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A HISTORY OF ENGLISH PROSODY





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A HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLISH PROSODY

FROM THE TWELFTH CENTURY TO  
THE PRESENT DAY

BY

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VOL. III

*FROM BLAKE TO MR. SWINBURNE*

*'Many rings!'—The Hollow Land*

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## CHAPTER I

### BURNS, BLAKE, AND THE CLOSE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (WITH AN EXCURSUS ON *OSSIAN*)

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OF the four chief poets who, making their appearance about 1780, represent the proper work of the last two decades of the eighteenth century, two, Cowper and Crabbe, necessarily found their place in the last volume of this History. For, though they influenced their greater juniors (some of whom were to make appearance during this same time, but none of whom produced really characteristic work till the very eve of the nineteenth), this influence was in hardly the least degree of a prosodic kind. Both to some extent, and Cowper to a considerable one, display a tendency to break away from strict allegiance to the Popian couplet, while we shall be able to quote some interesting though but half-illuminated prosodic remarks of Cowper, postponed for the purpose, in this very Book. Cowper’s “blanks” must have been, and were, not quite unintentionally, a serious disintegrating force. But in mere verse, and still more in that all-

A glance  
backwards at  
Crabbe and  
Cowper

important point of diction which is inseparable from prosody, both were of the older school—laboriously rhetorical or laboriously easy. In neither is there much, if indeed there is any, sign of the great rain which was to descend upon the parched and weary land of English versification, and to make it once more—what it had been in the seventeenth century, and even on a greater and more gorgeous scale—a *hortus non succus* of every kind of prosodic flower, an orchard lavishing every kind of prosodic fruit

With the two great companions and contemporaries, whose work would certainly have shocked Cowper, and would probably at this time have puzzled Crabbe, though it is very improbable that any of Blake or much of Burns was known to the former,<sup>1</sup> it was different. Poetry had to become as a little child before it could enter into the new kingdom of heaven—that is to say, it had to become lyrical again, and though Cowper was a great lyrist in his way, and Crabbe not quite a contemptible one, their way was not child-like

Part of the value of Burns, from the point of view just taken, only slightly concerns us. The *alterative* power of his diction—its value as a solvent to the stiff conventionality of eighteenth-century poetry—cannot be exaggerated, but as this diction was dialectic it could not affect, or could affect but very little, the prosodic material of general English poetry. With his metres it was very different. As was indicated in the last volume, it is in Burns that the ballad once more begins to exert its reviving force. Percy's collection had already been

<sup>1</sup> Blake and Cowper had Hayley for their sole *nexus*—a most remarkable one, but Cowper had fallen into his last and saddest stage long before Flaxman introduced Blake to Hayley, and actually died just before Blake's visit to Felpham. As for Burns, the words in the text may be open to misconception. Cowper, of course, read Burns in the summer of 1787, and refers to him enthusiastically in letters to Rost, who gave him the book. But he wanted him to "divest himself of barbarism" in language, to "content himself with pure English," etc., and makes no reference to his form, if indeed this is not, as seems likely, included in the "dark lantern" wherein he thought Burns's bright candle was "shut up." This is what I mean by "not knowing much of him", not to mention that the Burns of 1787 was not *all* Burns.

at work as a model for nearly twenty years, Watson's, Allan Ramsay's, Ambrose Philips's, for much longer. But these were "models" not of the live kind, and for a very long time—in fact (with the exceptions of Chatterton and Blake) until Southey, if not till *The Ancient Mariner*—they produced little or nothing but copies and *pastiches*, vitiated more or less by infusion of eighteenth-century style. The almost uncanny way in which Burns incorporated, or rather *transcorporated* and transanimated at once, scraps of ancient song into his own, is well known. The result in his case was neither *pastiche* nor copy, but a genuine fresh growth from the old stool or stem. For our purpose not merely are the "English" poems of little or no value, but pieces of narrative substance in more or less literary form, like the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, go with them. It is the lyrics and the octosyllabic couplet pieces that give him his pride of place here.

That probably not a single one of the metres in which these are written is an actual invention—even of that modified kind in which the maker *reinvents* without definite knowledge, or at least thought, of his predecessors—is no doubt a fact, but it makes not the smallest difference of interest or merit. The famous "Burns-metre" has been traced by the ingenious to those other ingenious who wrote it in foreign lands and early mediæval times, and we have seen how it is as common as anything (and commoner than "common measure" itself) in English poetry, certainly of the fifteenth, perhaps of the late fourteenth century. It was neither the less nor the more for this a godsend, and if not a panacea, a sovereign remedy for many of the worst ills at the end of the eighteenth. It was one of the crotchets of the time—we shall see it extending far later than Burns's death in precept and criticism—that very varied lengths of line were bad things, and much intertwined rhyme if possible a worse. Almost the whole beauty of this "Burns-metre" (which was at least five hundred years old, perhaps much more, when Burns was born) consists in the sharp "pull-up" of the fourth and sixth lines as

His "alterative" power

compared with the other four, and the break of fresh rhyme after the opening triplet. The eighteenth century had despised refrains, Burns brought them in on every possible occasion, both in the regular form of exact, or nearly exact, repetition, and in the other of partly altered "bobs" at the end of verses, as in the whirling variety of the *Jolly Beggars*—a sort of kitten-and-dead-leaves dance of different measures, contrasted not more strikingly with the decent monotony of the couplet itself than with the altogether different variety of such things as Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*. Music, throughout the poems, is constantly doing her good genie work (as we have seen she can sometimes do bad ditto) in suggesting fresh movements and varying old ones, while double rhymes, internal rhymes, all tricks of which rhyme is capable, lend their aid.

So large a part, indeed, of Burns's best and most harmonious work is either directly written to well-known tunes or even partly built up on already familiar word-rhythms, that original prosodic quality is less easy to distinguish in him than in some far inferior poets. On the whole, he is not, considering his general value, specially happy with continuous anapaestic measure. Some of the old Scots forms which he uses, particularly the internal-rhymed "bob" (*v. sup.* vol. 1, 383), are not always particularly beautiful. But of the iamb and trochee, on the most various suggestions of music, he is almost a perfect master. The prosodic quality of *Macpherson's Farewell* could not be better, and that of *Bannocks of Barley*<sup>2</sup> is quite independent of any prescribed tune. It makes its own, as (we have pointed it out often) lyrics of real prosodic quality always do.

<sup>1</sup> Alas! the old blunder of objecting to irregularities of that kind is not dead. As I revise my "copy" I have before me an extract or *précis* from a document issued by the Scotch Education Department, depicting "abnormal compass," "awkward intervals," and "eccentric rhythms" in school selections. Now these are the very *fermenta salutatoris*, the salt that keeps true prosody alive, the training-school of the ear.

<sup>2</sup> This, one may just point out, belongs to that most interesting class of which "Phyllida flouts me" is the choir-leader, and which offer the choice of dactyl and trochee, anapaest and amphibrach, with such bewildering complaisance.

One trisyllabic use of Burns's, however, is of special interest and importance—not that it is his invention, for it is as old as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*<sup>1</sup> at least, but because of his felicitous use of it, because of its intrinsic beauty; because he (or Apollo) taught it to Coleridge, and because it proved to be one of the touchstones which show the theories of Guest to be utterly false metal<sup>2</sup>. This is what the latter calls, in his talismanic terminology, the "section 9," and dismisses as having "very little to recommend it." This *vaurien* among lines is the ordinary three-foot iambic, or second line of the common measure, with a fixed substitution of anapæst for iamb in the first place, as in the two well-known lines of *John Barleycorn*

Like a rogue | for for|gene

and

Tho' the tear | were in | her eye,

with which may be compared some of the most magnificent lines in *The Ancient Mariner*

Like the whiz | of my | crossbow,

and others. The improvement which this "spur in the head" gives to the verse is extraordinary, and it is noteworthy that much of it is lost if the anapæst is doubled, as in

For he crushed | him between | two stones

You want the check as well as the spur to produce the curvet

And in all these, in his songs to the quaintest, catchiest tunes, in his mere fragments, there is the quicksilver, the live blood which had been the main thing missing for a hundred years or so at least. Failure to keep even the exactest and most exacting measure is very rare, but in another sense the verse is not measured out at all—it glows under the hand and flows from the lips of the singer as an organic, not an inorganic thing. It is in this hardly surpassed power of fingering—of giving life to every

Of the highest importance but comparatively simple

<sup>1</sup> *V. sup.* 1 264, note

In a dow|fe like|nes than

<sup>2</sup> *V. inf.* on Guest himself also his book, ed Skeat, p 183



metre that he touches—that Burns's prosodic value consists. He invented, as has been said, little or nothing prosodically, and his most distinguishing poetic qualities are much more of sentiment or of phrase than of actual versification. When you look at his predecessors down to Fergusson you find the very same measures, but with infinitely less *diable au corps* in them. Now, as this infusion of *diable* (*bon diable*, of course) *au corps* was exactly what eighteenth-century poetry wanted, nobody could have been a greater benefactor to it than Burns was. For his verse not only danced and sang itself, but, as in fairy stories, it made all the hearers and readers who had any dancing or singing faculty go and do likewise—made them, at any rate, discontented with the tramp or the saunter, with the drone and the sing-song, of earlier eighteenth-century verse. In other respects his prosody is perfectly plain sailing, and in its own way it supplies a fresh illustration of that prosodic correctness which we have noted in the early poets of Middle Scots.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is one point of importance about it which I do not remember ever to have seen sufficiently urged—the way in which he represents a tradition older than the Gascoignian fancy about the non-existence of trisyllabic feet, and so brings us back to the sound practice of these elders.

Blake his  
complexity

Nothing could well afford a sharper contrast than the prosodic study offered by the greatest of his close contemporaries in poetry. The work of "English Blake"<sup>2</sup> (he called himself so, and his Irish blood appears to be

<sup>1</sup> Burns's greatest prosodic triumph appears to me to be in the famous "Jessy" song, with the unique substitution of "despruing" in the third line of the first verse. On the question why he did not repeat the shortening in the others there might be "some argument."

<sup>2</sup> Mr Sampson's admirable Clarendon Press edition (Oxford, 1905) has "antiquated" all others for the *Poems*, but the Aldine (London, 1874 and since) is still desirable for *Thel* and *Turkel*. Nor can the student, even of Blake's text, dispense with Mr Swinburne's famous *Essay* (1866), which gives in comfortable type large extracts from the Prophecies, with Gilchrist (preferably the second edition, London, 1880), for much prose, typed prophecy, etc., with Messrs Ellis and Yeats's *Blakian thesaurus* (3 vols, London, 1893), or with Mr Ellis's later type printed *Works* (Poetic and Prophetic) (2 vols, London, 1906).

eminently what the Articles describe as "a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of scripture") may appear at first sight as a prosodic chaos beside the varied but regular organisation of the verse of the Scottish bard. Not merely the unfortunate outsiders who talk about Blake's "drivel" and "doggerel," but people in a much less parlous state, and even those of the very select who have taken upon themselves to patch and piece and plaster Blake's poems into regularity, have ignored the extraordinary prosodic quality which, almost as much as his thought, his imagery, and his passion, distinguishes him as a poet. Of course a great deal—in fact, the immense majority—of his verse has come to us in the most dishevelled condition possible, and though we have not a few MS corrections of his own, very few of them can be supposed to represent in any sense a *bon à tirer*. On the *Poetical Sketches* he seems to have refused to bestow any paternal care at all, in fact, there are actual suspicions of infanticide as to the larger part of the edition. His only other regularly printed book of verse, the First Book of *The French Revolution*, is a vanished mystery<sup>1</sup>. In the two sets of *Songs* and the wide range of the "prophetic" or semi-prophetic books, we have to remember the method of production, and the fact that he was evidently always thinking of the meaning or the ornament, not the poetical form—exception made for the *Jerusalem* manifesto, to which we shall come in good time. This, taken literally, would exclude prosody in the ordinary sense from among the minute particulars to which no doubt he did pay attention. The conditions of the singular MSS which, to the disgrace of the country, have been allowed to go to America, make the "rough copy" the rule, not the exception, in much of his most interesting poetical work. And, lastly, that curious mental diathesis which it is so difficult to describe without exciting a hubbub,<sup>2</sup> would certainly not make for what is

<sup>1</sup> It was so to me and to nearly everybody when I wrote this notice, but *v inf* pp 23-5

<sup>2</sup> Although it is perhaps an irrelevancy, and a rather perilous one, may I—as a Blakite since the day when, as a small boy, I discovered the "Mad

*The Poetical  
Sketches*

commonly thought prosodic exactness. But let us go from generalities to "the blessed originals"

Whether some of the MS scraps, especially those of *The Island in the Moon*, are earlier or not than the *Poetical Sketches* is a question which could only be discussed with the result of further swelling the immense amount of superfluous talk already existing on the subject. There can be no reason at all for doubting that the *Sketches* represent, fairly and rather fully, the poet-painter-prophet's work before and up to his six-and-twentieth year. The "Advertisement," in fact, limits them to his twentieth, and so much the better if it be so, for that would put them before 1777, only seven years later than Chatterton's death. As was absolutely inevitable in the circumstances, there is perpetual imitation in them. But, on the one hand, this imitation is largely directed to things which were only just being imitated at all, and which it was not yet fashionable to imitate, and, on the other, there is much which is anything but imitative. Elizabethan and seventeenth-century influences appear everywhere in the opening "Season" pieces, the bold enjambment, the studiously varied pause, the epanaphora, all give evidence of this kind, and the same influence colours, in a fashion partly comic, the Strawberry-Hill supernatural of "Fair Elenor." But there is nothing comic in the wonderful eight of

How sweet I roamed from field to field,

which is Caroline of the best kind. "My Silks and Fine Array," though more directly imitative, is Elizabethan in its imitation, and so is "Memory, hither come." The fingering in these last three pieces is miraculous, and it must be remembered that the manner had not been

Song" and part of the "Catalogue" in Southey's *Doctor*, and as one who defies any of his rivals to be *Blakier* than himself—suggest that there is something unwise in the nervous deprecation of "madness"? What is any man—especially any poet—good for if he is not a little mad in the ordinary and prosaic sense of the term? And it is in the ordinary and prosaic sense of the term only that madness can be, or indeed ever is, ascribed to Blake. If the fools think the worse of him for it, let them, but why should we be as the fools?

transmitted—a little the worse for the transmission, but continuous and alive—as it had been in Burns's case Nobody except Chatterton had sung like that—had modulated measures like that—since the middle of the seventeenth century.

But the "diploma-piece" from our point of view—the piece which, like a few of Chatterton's own, shows that a new birth of prosody had come—is the afore-mentioned "Mad Song" For pure verse-effect—assisted powerfully by diction, of course, and not to be divorced from thought, but existing independently of it—there are few pieces in English or any language to beat this marvellous thing And it is very noticeable that its ineffable music is really prosodic, not musical at all. I do not know whether anybody has ever tried to set it, but I cannot fancy the tune at all, and I require none. The scheme is very simple, and capable of being defined with rigid accuracy Lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 are iambic monometer with full anapæstic and, I think, in one case monosyllabic substitution, 5, 6, 7 extend themselves by a foot to dimeter brachycatalectic with substitution existent but rather less free The foot-equivalence is thus rigidly maintained throughout, and the line-correspondence in the stanza equally so, and yet, as you read, the thing shifts, outline and texture and shade, like the "rustling beds of dawn" themselves The one real or apparent "irregularity" of the piece, the substitution of the quatrain rhymed *o a o a* for *a a b b*, is very likely intentional, and certainly not a discord, as it comes in the middle stanza, and so does not disturb the concerted effect If anybody objects to the "cockney" rhyme of "dawn" and "scorn," he may "go shake his ears," which are probably long enough to wave like the reeds that told the story of Midas On the other hand, it has always been a matter of amazement to me how Dante Rossetti, with the double sympathy of poet and painter, could have changed "beds" to "birds" As I ventured to point out in *The Academy* thirty-five years ago, when reviewing Mr W M Rossetti's edition, the entire imagery of the poem is atmospheric, and the phrase

✓ beds of dawn" for the clouds whence sun and wind  
issue is infinitely fine. But the whole should be given  
 and scanned —

The wīld | wīnds wēep  
 And thē nīght | īs ā-cōld,  
 Cōmē hī|thēr, Slēep,  
 And mý gīēfs | ūnfōld  
 Būt lō' | thē mōrn|īng pēlps,  
 Ōvēr | thē eas|tērn sēēps,  
 And thē rúst|līng bēds | of dāwn  
 Thē eāth | dō scōrn

Lō' | tō thē vāult  
 Ōf pā|vēd hēavēn,  
 Wīth sōi|rōw frāught,  
 Mý nōtes | āre dīven  
 Thēy strīke | thē eār|ōf nīght,  
 Make wēep | thē ēyēs | of dāy  
 Thēy makē mād | thē rōa|rīng wīnds,  
 And wīth tēm | pēsts plāy

Līkē ā fiēd | īn ā clōud,  
 Wīth hōw|līng wōe  
 Āftēr nīght | Ī dō cōwd  
 And wīth nīght | wīll gō ,  
 Ī tuīn | mý bāck | tō thē Eāst,  
 Frōm whēnce cōm|fōrts hāve | īncrēasēd,  
 Fōr līght | dōth sēize | mý brāin  
 Wīth frān|tīc pāin

Of course, if anybody is afraid of "Lō'" as a mono-  
 syllabic foot, he can have "Lō' tō | thē vāult", but I

think it inferior "Vaut" for rhyme has ample justification

Nobody in the eighteenth century, not even Chatterton, had yet returned to the true blend of freedom and order in English prosody with such a perfect result as this. In fact, I hardly know a better document or object-lesson for the display of that prosody than this very piece, and if it were not doing it wrong, being so majestical and exquisite at once, to put it to base uses, I should employ nothing in preference to it. Take it on the accent or stress system, neglecting the unaccented or unstressed syllables in their exact combination with the others, and you lose more than half its beauty and almost all comprehension of that beauty's source. Take the fect, and the delicacy, the unerringness, and at the same time the freedom and variety of their interchange, compose a marvel for ever.

Even Blake could not increase our prosodic comforts after this fashion every time that he took pen in hand—much more every time that his ever-industrious and ever-vagabond pencil strayed from drawing to writing. The ballad measure of "Gwin, King of Norway" has some fine phrase,<sup>1</sup> but its actual rhythm hardly gets out of the jog-trot which, the Ancient Mariner bursts into that long silent sea, beset the ballad. His Spenserian experiments are among the greatest of prosodic curiosities. He makes six shots at it, "all different and all wrong," as Mr Sampson laconically but exhaustively observes. That he varies the number of lines from eight to ten, does not observe the final Alexandrine regularly, and often ends with a couplet, is less surprising when we remember Prior's rehandling, which was pretty certain to be in an eighteenth-century mind, than it may seem to us at first. But he was evidently quite out of sympathy with the measure, and his diction and line-forging are

<sup>1</sup> It also shows the *Ossian* influence (see Excursus at end of chapter). The chiefs who stood round the king,

Like reared stones around a grave,

can hardly be irremniscent of those who "stood silent around as the stones of Loda" in the second "Duan" of *Cath Loda* (i 22, ed. cit. inf.)

Miltonic rather than Spenserian. So, too, the "blanks" of *Edward the Third* are failures, from no dissimilar reason. Whether he was actually acquainted with the præ-Shakespearian drama, one cannot say. But, once more, the diction and line-forging suggest some acquaintance with this, and much with Milton less with Shakespeare himself, outside the historical plays, than we should have expected.

The *Songs of  
Innocence*

That in writing the *Songs of Innocence* and those of *Experience* Blake had Watts at least to some extent before him has occurred independently to several persons indeed, it could hardly escape any one acquainted with the two, and interested in the subject. But the following is of the most casual and intermittent kind, and though we have seen that Watts is contemptible neither as poet nor as prosodist, there could not be two persons, poets, or prosodists much more different than Lady Abney's respectable chaplain and Hayley's recalcitrant guest. The exquisite "Introduction"<sup>1</sup> is once more seventeenth century with a new touch in it, and there are not many trochaic quatrains of sevens in English that "drop their honey" in a sweeter fashion. The anapæsts of "The Echoing Green" are purposely and beautifully puerile, and the anapæstic measures throughout keep this tone for the most part. But the trochee is Blake's great weapon here, and he reverses the old saying by bringing strength out of its sweetness in the most wonderful way. The sweetness is still uppermost in "Little Lamb, who made thee?"<sup>2</sup> but there are presagings of the different joy that is to come, long before we actually reach the "Tiger" and find the whole cast of the metre changed from softness and an almost coaxing lubricity to splendour and terror.<sup>2</sup> And though the trochee haunts him, he can

<sup>1</sup> Piping down the valleys wild,  
Piping songs of pleasant glee, etc

<sup>2</sup> One of the numerous *genuine* variants (there are others)—  
What dread hand *forged* thy dread feet—

seems to me the *ne plus ultra* of the measure in this direction. It makes almost a seven-foot line with pause syllables after every spoken one.

quite dispense with it "Infant Joy"<sup>1</sup> is almost as astonishing as the "Mad Song" in what it effects by short plain iambic metre, not suggestive of tune in the least, but of perfect prosodic music. The heroic quatrain of "The Little Black Boy" is neither Dryden nor Gray, in fact, it escapes the monotony which is the curse of the measure rather better than either. But one might specify almost every piece for the new spirit that is breathed into the old forms.

The *Songs of Experience* open with something different and of *Experience* Blake had evidently been early impressed by Milton's *ance* "Nativity Hymn" and other grave concerted forms, and by the "broken and cuttitt" measures of the earlier Elizabethans. But he applied their lessons with his own fortunate assumption of free trisyllabic substitution, and the result in the "Introduction" and its answer is extraordinary. A finer stanza for construction and sound it will be hard to find than that of

O Earth! O Earth! return!  
 Arise from out the dewy grass  
     Night is worn,  
     And the morn  
 Rises from the slumberous mass  
  
 Turn away no more,  
 Why wilt thou turn away?  
     The starry floor,  
     The watery shore,  
 Is given thee till the break of day<sup>2</sup>

Blake wrote "wat'ry" and "giv'n" according to the prescriptions of Bysshe, whose work, we know, he possessed, but the love of poetry laughs at such locksmiths, and we may spell it as he would have spelt it to-day, though the shorter feet make good metre enough. If it were not

<sup>1</sup> "I have   no name, I am but two days old" What shall I call thee? "I hap py am, Joy is my name" Sweet joy befall thee!	Pret ty joy, Sweet joy but two days old, Sweet joy, I call thee. Thou   dost smile, I sing the while, "Sweet joy befall thee!"
--	---

<sup>2</sup> I think ("reasoning rightly and in my own division") I would rather have written these lines than anything in English poetry outside of Shakespeare



entirely alien from his temperament to have done so, one might suppose that he had purposely juxtaposed "The Fly," where the linelets flit and cross like flies themselves, with the majesty of the "Tiger", and certainly, if he had been making a parade of his prosodic power, he could not have done better than to follow them with the sort of blend of the two which is found in "Lyca," "The Little Girl Lost" and "Found" Many others tempt the student, and if Blake had kept up the rhythm of the opening couplet of "The Sunflower"—

Ah! Sun|flower, wea|ry of time,  
Who count|est the steps | of the sun—

he would have anticipated, in one of its most difficult shapes, the triumphs of the nineteenth century with the unmixed or, at any rate, predominant anapaest for purposes other than light • As it is, he has shaken the jungle of Shenstone, and even of Cowper, out of the three-foot form, and put clangour and cry in its place

ie MS  
iemis

Of the poems from MS, though they contain some wonderful things, there may seem less need to say much prosodically, because they are, from the nature of the case, unfinished Nor do they contain much that is new in scheme Yet they are full of the new prosodic secret—the secret that was not fully known even to the Elizabethan age, though it actually gave the impulse to that great age's poets The very first piece in the Rossetti book, christened by editors before Mr Sampson "Love's Secret," shows this to the full It is given below<sup>1</sup> with its MS variants and deletions, and nobody

~~-seek-~~

<sup>1</sup> Deleted—[Never pain to tell thy love,  
Love that never told can be,  
For the ~~the~~ wind doth move  
Silently, ~~invisibly~~ ]

I told my love, I told my love,  
I told her all my heart,  
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears—  
Ah! she doth depart

Soon as she was gone from me  
A traveller came by—

who has an ear can fail to see that, with or without these—in the face of the fact that we do not in the least know how Blake would have printed it finally,—the prosodic unity, the kinship of the feet, and the wondrous dance that they trip out, are unmistakable Like the “Mad Song,” it is a thing that you will find nowhere but in English poetry like that, it shows what English poetry can and may do in the prosodic way The quintessence of it is almost overpowering, and it carries with it the beau bouquet de roses franches which La Quinte always has by her to recover her lovers of their ecstasy

The trochaic half-trimeters catalectic of

- Silent, silent Night

have been even better known to lovers of poetry for a long time The first triplet, at any rate, is unsurpassable, and the still rapture of it only contrasts in the right way with the rush of the iambs in an equally famous stanza of another fragment<sup>1</sup> The absolute mastery of substitution which distinguishes this unique poet appears almost as well as anywhere in “The Wildflower’s Song,” and it is very interesting to observe the slight change of time which suffices to turn this into what may be called Blake’s “Skeltonics,” of which “The Fairy,” better known as “The Marriage Ring,” is a famous example<sup>2</sup> His

Silently, invisibly—

Oh! was no deny

~~He took her with a sigh~~

If there are anywhere much finer examples of the effect of “accephalous” third and fourth lines, inclining now (“Trembling,” etc.) to trochaic suggestion, now (“Silently,” etc.) to monosyllabic opening, I do not know them There is, however, parallel magic in

I laid me down upon a bank,

Where Love lay sleeping,

I heard among the rushes dank—

Weeping, weeping

- <sup>1</sup> Silent, silent Night,  
Quench the holy light  
Of thy torches bright

Let age and sickness silent rob  
The vineyards in the night,  
But those who burn with vigorous youth  
Pluck fruits before the light—

- <sup>2</sup> As I wandered the forest,  
The green leaves among,  
I heard a wildflower  
Singing a song,  
etc etc

Come hither, my sparrows,  
My little arrows,  
If a tear or a smile  
Will a man beguile,  
etc etc

magnificent trochaic dimeters catalectic—the greatest of all his metres—are nowhere shown better than in the central stanzas of the poem, only to be found faithfully rendered in Mr Sampson's edition, but known to most Blake-lovers by Rossetti's title of "Broken Love"<sup>1</sup> The miraculous lampoon on Klopstock, which has in considerable part blushed itself off the face of the manuscript and away from the knowledge of man since Mr Swinburne described it forty years ago, is either "Christabel" before "Christabel" and adjusted to *burla*, or Butler equivalenced into a wilder state of prosodic puckishness than *Hudibras* itself displays. But to find one of those contrasts so natural to Blake, one has but to turn over three poems—two of them mere fragments—and find the "soft repentant moan" of "Morning"<sup>2</sup> In the dashed-off scraps of epigram-fragment it might seem idle to look for much, but we find in them not infrequent evidence of a nervous grip of the heroic couplet—once more contrasting, strangely enough to the novice if not quite so to the expert, with the Æolian harp murmurings of one part of the verse and the reckless doggerel (as some call it) of another A fair specimen of this last is the piece beginning—

I rose up at the dawn of day ,

---

<sup>1</sup> Seven of my sweet loves thy knife  
Has bereaved of their life  
Their marble tombs I built with tears,  
And with cold and shuddering fears  
Seven more loves weep night and day,  
Round the tomb where my loves lay,  
And seven more loves attend each night  
Around my couch with torches bright  
And seven more loves in my bed  
Crown with wine my mournful head,  
Pitying and forgiving all  
My transgressions, great and small

"Seven" has all its own mystical virtues in prosody, for pretty obvious reasons, but this is the "Song of Seven" in sense after sense

<sup>2</sup> To find the Western path,  
Right through the gates of Wrath,  
I urge my way  
Sweet Mercy leads me on  
With soft repentant moan—  
I see the break of day

but to see it in perfection we must go to the famous "Everlasting Gospel," which is once more "Christabel" *endemniada*, while the "Auguries of Innocence" in the Pickering MS fall back nearly, but by no means quite, to regular octosyllables with little but the usual catalectic licence

In all these lyrics (and if I seem to those not "entered" in Blake to have quoted too many, I shall certainly seem to the initiated to have quoted too few), as well as in others down to the merest scraps and fragments, there is a really extraordinary prosodic quality. There is no mere "rocking-horse" fluency, no mere command of this metre or that in average consummate-ness, with perfection after a sort, but without variety or individuality. The poet has so thoroughly and instinctively grasped the essential values of his measures that he can convert these values—monosyllabic, dissyllabic, or trisyllabic—with the unerringness of an accomplished money-teller. And what is more, he can be *really* "regular"—that is to say, can substitute feet, or within limits increase and diminish length of line, at no danger to the general prosodic scheme. In direct and glaring contrast to almost the whole poetic habit of the eighteenth century, mere mechanical regularity finds in him somebody who does not want it, does not care for it, will not have it, and who yet never misses the regularity that is beyond and above mechanism. His regular verse, even as Byshe counted regularity, his equivalenced varieties, and his "doggerel," all bear equal testimony to this ineradicable sense of foot- and line-value, and the result is that, by any one who desires really to understand English prosody, there is no verse, within a small compass, so valuable as his.

It is, however, not in the least surprising that he found pure verse insufficient—or at least galling and hampering—for his "prophetic" exertations. He has indeed managed to put into it some of the cream of these, and many interesting by-passages. But English lyric is a spirit too delicate for the commands of a mysticism which,

The  
"Prophetic"  
Books

though nothing in the world so little as "earthy and abhorred," is somewhat chaotic and gigantesque. My own impression is—the other Blakites may pity or disdain me as a mere sojourner in the court of the Gentiles if they like—that Blake could have distilled everything that was valuable from Tiriel to Jerusalem, and (if it was later) *Oothoon*, with anything else that may have perished in the hands of the accursed Tatham, into the forms of "Broken Love," and "Auguries of Innocence," and "The Everlasting Gospel"—if Fate and his own rather wilful will had let him. But he was "let" in the opposite sense, and prose, ordinary or rhythmized, approaching sometimes close to very long regular forms of verse, served him for the first utterances of "the visions that his soul had seen." The discussion of this part of his writing belongs partly to that most interesting History of Prose Rhythm which I should like to write, but am not now writing, yet to leave it entirely undiscussed here would be out of the question. We have a sort of authoritative pronouncement of his own on the subject, but, as very often happens, it is not desirable to take this too seriously. Afterthought has generally a great deal more to do than forethought with these explanations, and it is noteworthy that this one occurs in the very latest of Blake's important "~~prophetic~~" utterances.

It<sup>1</sup> runs thus —

<sup>b</sup> Blake's note  
on their form

"When this verse was first dictated to me [*Blake, as is well known, disclaiming all "authorship" in the ordinary sense of the term*] I considered a monotonous cadence like that used by Milton and Shakespeare and all writers of English blank verse, derived [*delivered?*] from the modern bondage of rhyming, to be a necessary and indispensable part of the verse. But I soon found that, in the mouth of a true orator, such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both in cadence and number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its place. The terrific numbers are

<sup>1</sup> *Jerusalem*, p. 3.

reserved for the terrific parts, the mild and gentle for the mild and gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts All are necessary to each other Poetry fettered fetters the human race"]

Of this—interesting as it is, both in itself, in its context, and in the bearing of the whole last clause on the ideas of the whole century preceding—we need not perhaps accept much more than the word "bondage" It may be frankly allowed that the result is more acceptable than the specimen of "monotonous cadence"<sup>1</sup> which precedes the words themselves But we shall venture, at whatever cost, to take our usual way with Blake, and to go patiently through the actual books with a few prefatory remarks on the probable sources of the forms we shall find

The first of these sources was, beyond all possibility of reasonable doubt, the Authorised Version of the Bible, in its mode of handling the poetical books and passages of the original The second, which, since Blake has been more studied and appreciated, his disciples seem rather to "shy at," but which seems to me almost as unmistakable as the first, is *Ossian* (*vide* Excursus at end of this chapter) The third was, perhaps, Swedenborg, and the fourth must have been something of the German tendency to long loose unrhymed lines which, with other Germanisms, came upon the last two decades of the English eighteenth century in various forms, from the Klopstockian hexameter to the Gessnerian "floppings" in prose But Blake had far too much of that uncomfortable but energising affection or possession which characterised his own

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*

- Who, in mysterious Sinai's awful cave,  
To man the wondrous art of writing gave,  
Again he speaks in thunder and in fire—  
Thunder of thought and flames of fierce desire  
Even from the depths of Hell his voice I hear  
Within the unfathomed caverns of my ear  
Therefore I print, nor vain my types shall be,  
Heaven, Earth, and Hell henceforth shall live in harmony

These are no bad couplets, and much more like Dryden than like Darwin or that luckless Hayley, his recent visit to whom Blake dismisses as "my three years' slumber on the banks of the ocean" But they would not have suited *Los* and *Albion* and the building of Golgonooza

"Long John Brown"—the devil in the interior—to follow any one of these exactly or slavishly. In most of the books he deviates sometimes into more or less regular verse, fourteeners and sixteeners are very liberally peppered over most. But, once more, let us go through them.

The Early  
Fragment

The piece sometimes accepted as earliest bears no title and is not contained in the thesaurus of Messrs Ellis and Yeats, but was partly printed by Mr W M Rossetti in *The Monthly Review* for August 1903, and reprinted, after the strange fashion of editorial meddling from which Blake has suffered so much, in Mr Ellis's type-edition. It bears out the prefatory remarks to *Jerusalem* as far as they have been accepted here, for it is blank-verse prose.<sup>1</sup>

*Tiriel*

The next, *Tiriel*, displays the results of feeling the "bondage." It has blank-verse *rhythm*, but the lines,<sup>2</sup> though fairly regular in apparent length on the page, are extended syllabically. Fourteeners and sixteeners are common here, and there are frequent redundances, but on the whole the iambic cadence is unbroken. The effect, occasional felicities excepted, is not very good, for these long lines want rhyme even more than shorter ones, and the scheme is too monotonous compared with that of Whitmanian or later Blakite rhymed prose.

*Thel*

The *Book of Thel*, which opens with a lyrical stanza, employs something of the same measure<sup>3</sup> as *Tiriel*, but

<sup>1</sup> As thus "'Woe,' cried the Muse, tears started at the sound, Grief perched upon my brow and Thought embraced her, 'What does this mean?' I cried, 'when all around Summer hath spread her plumes and tunes her notes.'" This arranges itself easily enough, though the original line-lengths as written have a (probably deceptive) suggestion of Alexandrines.

"Woe," cried the Muse (tears started at the sound),  
Grief perched upon my brow and Thought embrac'd her,  
"What does this mean?" I cried, "when all around  
Summer hath spread her plumes and tunes her notes."

<sup>2</sup> With Myratana, once the Queen of all the western plains,

Were we not slaves till we rebelled? Who cares for Tiriel's curse?

<sup>3</sup> The opening block will do well enough, though a longer extract than our space permits would be needed to show the "paragraph" effect. *Thel* and *Tiriel*, however, are easily accessible in eye-saving type.

The Daughters of the Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,  
All but the youngest she in paleness sought the secret air,

the poet has grown more expert with it, it is much more systematised, and not seldom the staves or tirades are constructed of pure fourteeners modulated to something like blank-verse paragraph-effect. This suits well enough with the tender and graceful quality which has been generally recognised in *Thel*, as bringing it close to the *Songs*

The very different temper of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* required, and received, a very different form *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*  
The opening has been spoken of as in "irregular unrhymed verse", but it is even more like prose than irregular unrhymed verse has a habit of being, and it soon becomes prose pure and simple, though frequently rhythmical, whether in the ~~broken axiomatic~~ form of the famous "Proverbs of Hell," or in continuous narrative. Nor is the final "Song of Liberty" very different, though it is, of course, ~~lyrical prose~~—a division which may some day be found useful.

As has been mentioned above, I was—until the whole of this notice of Blake, except the present paragraph, was actually in type—under the impression that the printed first book of the *French Revolution* (1791) had utterly disappeared. But certain friends of mine who happened to see my proofs knew better, and their great kindness asked for me what the even greater kindness of the Linnell Trustees granted—the privilege of seeing a copy. It would be an irrelevance, and, in fact, somewhat of a breach of faith, to make any general critical remarks on it here, or to describe and criticise the substance. I shall merely say that I am utterly at a loss to understand how Mr Swinburne, especially considering his general opinions at the time, could have thought it "mere wind and splutter." We are here only concerned with its form, of which the few persons who have hitherto mentioned it say absolutely nothing. It consists of about three hundred lines of great length—much longer than the

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To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day  
Down by the river of Adona her soft voice is heard,  
And thus her gentle lamentation falls like morning dew



average prophetic "prose-verse" analysed below. On the page these lines appear pretty equal, syllabically they vary from about sixteen to about twenty-one, nineteen being a very common length. The metrical norm is a seven-foot anapaest, sometimes cut short, sometimes extended, and undergoing substitution of the most unlimited kind, with the result that the rhythm constantly approaches (and sometimes very closely) the long swinging forms of which Mr Swinburne was himself so fond in his later days, and which Tennyson sometimes tried, while occasionally dactylic heptameters, conglomerations of amphibrachs, and a whole kaleidoscopic ~~water~~ <sup>world</sup> of systems are suggested. I am most kindly permitted to quote as well as to read and comment, so I choose some half-dozen striking individual lines, and a batch of another half-dozen like those taken from the other books below. As Blake positively asserts that the rest was finished, it is to be assumed that the form was the same, but he certainly laid it aside later. Page 5

Then the ancientest peer, Duke of Burgundy, rose from the Monarch's  
     right hand, red as wines  
 From his mountains, an odour of war like ripe vineyard rose from his  
     garments,  
 And the chamber became as a clouded sky, o'er the council he  
     outstretched his red limbs,  
 Cloth'd in flames of crimson, as a ripe vineyard stretches over sheaves  
     of corn  
 The fierce Duke hung over the council, around him crowd, weeping  
     in his burning robe,  
 A bright cloud of infant souls, his words fall like purple autumn on  
     the sheaves

(Is it not easy to guess how Blake would have engraved this?)

Sick the mountains and all their vineyards weep in the eyes of the  
     kingly mourner

For the Commons convene in the Hall of the Nation France shakes  
     And the Heavens of France

Eternally rushing round like a man on his hands and knees, day and night without rest

Crying Hide from the living! our bonds and our prisoners shout in the open field

For the bars of Chaos are burst, her millions prepare their fiery way

Seest thou yonder dark castle that moated around | keeps this city of Paris in awe

While they vote | the removal of war | and the pestilence weighs | his red wings | in the sky

Get rhyming syllables at "castle" and "around," at "removal" and "pestilence," and every one will recognise the tune. It is probable that when, later, he discarded the form, it was because this tune was too prevalent. But it is certainly not unsuited to the narrative-dramatic character of the piece.

In the great group, however, to which the name of *Albion*, "Prophetic Books" proper has been by some, perhaps a *America*, and a little arbitrarily, restricted, the return to quasi-poetic form is marked and universal, though there is nearly as marked a progression, from the almost regular extended blank verse of *Tiriel* and *Thel* to the structure—much more elaborate and sometimes hardly iambic at all—of *Jerusalem*. *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, one of the most interesting of the books in many ways, is not least so in the way in which it brings the not flaccid but mild and gentle measure of *Thel* and *Tiriel* into line with the sterner subject of the piece, and with the wonderful designs which, if they cannot be said exactly to *illustrate* it, clothe it with an atmosphere of magnificent gloom, and haunt it with figures of passion and terror. Already the iambic staple changes itself, not merely into equivalences—of these, as we have seen, Blake had been from the first a master—but into prosodic phrases and values, *not* equivalent by the laws of verse, though admissible by those of rhythmized prose. In fact, just as I have suggested the "Mad Song" and other poems as examples typical of

verse-prosody, so are numerous places of these books typical of what we may call with no uncomplimentary intent "bastard-rhythm"—that is to say, neither pure verse nor pure though rhythmical prose, but a hybrid between them.

*Urizen, Los,  
and Ahanian*

*America* and *Europe* are, in this as in other ways, closely connected with *Albion*. But in *Urizen* we come to a remarkable change which persists through *Los* and *Ahanian*. Here the poet-engraver has arranged his text in double columns, which necessitate, of course, much shorter lines, and these are, sometimes at least, real lines, not mere line-halves, separated for the convenience of arrangement. Sometimes (as in *Urizen*, page 4, stanza 7<sup>1</sup>) the rhythm suggests, and indeed insists upon, that favourite eighteenth-century measure, the three-foot anapaest, and sometimes, again (page 9, stanza 6<sup>2</sup>), it almost arrives at the immense improvement of this which Byron and Praed and Mr Swinburne were to achieve, with even a suspicion of rhyme. He will drop further into regular three-foot iambs, and the short throbbing rhythm seems to force itself into harmony with the writhing forms beneath, above, or opposite the "letter-press" (See also 23, 4). These short lines are in *Los* less essentially short than in *Urizen*, and enjamb much

<sup>1</sup> And a roof, | vast petrific around,  
On all | sides he fram'd | like a womb,  
Where thousands of rivers in veins  
Of blood pour down the mountains to cool,  
The eternal fires beating without  
From Eternals and like a black globe  
View'd by sons of Eternity standing  
On the shore of the infinite ocean,  
Like a human heart struggling and beating,  
The vast world of Urizen appear'd

<sup>2</sup> In a horrible dream | ful slumber,  
Like the linked | infernal chain,  
A vast spine writh'd in torment  
Upon the winds, shooting pun'd,  
Ribs | like a bending cavern,  
And bones | of solidness froze  
Over all his nerves of joy  
And a First Age passed over,  
And a state of dismal woe

Those who think that Blake *always* indicated the valued *ed* by writing it without an apostrophe may question the first marked couplet, but the second remains

more frequently, and the same is partly the case with *Ahania*, though the last chapter of this seems to have great difficulty in preventing itself from being regularly lyrical. It has been said that more or less regular lyrics occur in some of the Books, and they will be found duly collected by Mr Sampson

One approaches *Vala* or *The Four Zoas* with some misgivings, for the eye of man (at least of this man) is not equal to deciphering much of Messrs Ellis and Yeats's facsimile of part, and their typographic representation of the whole has been questioned by no less formidable and competent a critic than Mr Sampson himself. Putting the two together, however, it is quite clear that Blake had now abandoned the short line and gone back to the long one of *Albion*, to which he thenceforward always, or almost always, adhered. In these generally, though the regular or almost regular fourteeners and sixteeneers often appear, what we have called the "bastard rhythm" is most prevalent, and it becomes more and more so in *Milton* and in *Jerusalem*. Indeed, in these remarkable journeyings "from Camberwell to Golgotha," and in the very un-Miltonic utterances of the Bard in the midst of sketches of Blake's cottage at Felpham and *encadrements* from Stonehenge, the almost smooth and almost solid blocks of fourteeners that we still find in *Vala* are much rarer, though I would hardly dare to say that they do not occur<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Here are some examples —

*Albion* type (*Visions*, p. 5)

Does the whale worship at thy footsteps as the hungry dog?  
Or does he scent the mountain prey, because his nostrils wide  
• Draw in the ocean? does his eye discern the flying cloud  
As the raven's eye? or does he measure the expanse like the vulture?  
Does the still spider view the cliffs where eagles hide their young?  
Or does the fly rejoice because the harvest is brought in?  
Does not the eagle scorn the earth and despise the treasures beneath?  
But the mole knoweth what is there, and the worm shall tell it thee,  
Does not the worm erect a pillar in the mouldering churchyard?

(Fourteener cadence, breaking down, or out, into *non* metrical prose rhythm)

*Vala* type (*Night*, vii p. 69)

With a crash breaking across, the horrible mass comes down  
Thund'ring, and hail and frozen iron hail'd from the Element

Summary on  
Blake

It is to be hoped that few readers will have failed to perceive, to some extent already, why so much space has been given to the prosody of a poet who, vastly as the appreciation of him has increased in the last thirty or forty years, is probably still regarded by most people as a sort of inspired doggerelist, if not as a doggerelist without the inspiration, while the appreciation itself has provoked the usual banal reaction against him. The reason simply is that, in the first place, no poet since Shakespeare seems to me to have had such an instinctive mastery of the great principle of perfected English prosody—foot-composition with free substitution, and that, in the second place, Blake shows the way to the progress in this line made by his younger contemporaries and followers, the poets of the nineteenth century proper. The way in which he extends this command to the slippery, doubtful, and as

'Rends thy white hair    Yet thou dost, fix'd, obdurate, brooding, sit  
Writing thy books    Anon, a cloud filled with a waste of snows  
Covers thee—still obdurate, still resolved, and writing still, etc. etc

(In this which has been kindly corrected for me, from a transcript of the original, by Prof Elton, the broken lines and strong varied pauses show a remarkable change of scheme.)

*Milton* type (p. 25)

They sing at the vintage    This is the last vintage, and seed  
Shall no more be sown upon earth till all the vintage is over,  
And all gather'd in—till the plow has passed over the nations,  
And the harrow and heavy thundering roller upon the mountains,  
And loud the souls howl round the porches of Golgonooza,  
Crying, "O God, deliver us," to the Heavens or to the Earth!

(A different stamp altogether. Metre almost disappearing, but a strong rhythmical split, at or a little beyond the middle, prevailing, as if in a sort of lengthened *Piers Plowman* scheme. As to a suggestion of *Sigurd* metre which has been made, we may wait till we come to that poem. Of course there is what may be called a *substratum* of fourteener generally.)

*Jerusalem* type (pure prose and straightforward blank verse sometimes, as at p. 77, but generally as follows (p. 48)) —

Beneath the bottoms of the graves which is Earth's central joint,  
There is a place where contraries are equally true  
(To protect from the giant blows in the sports of intellect,  
*Thunder in the midst of kindness, and love that kills its beloved,*  
Because Death is for a period, and they renew tenfold),  
From this sweet place maternal love awoke Jerusalem

(Not unlike the *Milton*, but with the central break less obvious, more enjambment, and every now and then, as in the italicised line, a distinct hexametrical suggestion.)

yet almost wholly unregimented "prose feet" in his later or prophetic books is not strictly for us—it must be kept to something else, to be written *si Dieu nous prête vie* and opportunity. The very regimenting just spoken of will have to be done there, though I have no fear of the result. It will not break Blake, but make him. In his verse proper there can be no doubt about the matter except in those persons who have not given themselves the trouble to understand it, who are still under the law of the syllabic or accentual Golgonooza. Let me refer readers once more to the scansion of the "Mad Song" given above, let me beg them, if they are sufficiently interested, to apply it to all the other specimens given, and then to go to the actual *corpus* of Blake's purely poetical work and continue the application. They need not, as Rossetti did (very pardonably considering all things), "fake" imperfect lines. That Blake left plenty of half-done work—work not even half done in many cases—is a mere historical fact. But his half-done work has the root of the matter in it; and his done work has root and stem and blossom and flower and fruit all at once, as if it grew in the gardens of Alcinous.

Cowper and Crabbe having been disposed of in the last volume, and Burns and Blake duly dealt with in this, the remaining verse of the last two decades of the eighteenth century may at first be thought to present a spectacle so forlorn—if not so absurd—that a page of gentle pity or gentler satire might suffice for it. That, however, would be hardly historical. It would be impossible duly to appreciate the virtue of Blake himself, it would be impossible to appreciate that larger, though hardly intenser, development which exists in the "Lampads Seven"<sup>1</sup> of the great Romantic return, and the smaller lights scattered round them, if we did not dispassionately contemplate and scientifically appraise Darwin and Hayley.

<sup>1</sup> The earliest work of the elder of these—the Lakers and Scott—belongs, of course, to this period, but it would be a pity to sever it from the later, to which, in some cases, it presents so strange a contrast.

and the Della Cruscan, and ~~their malleus~~ Gifford, and the rest

Darwin

A very famous personage was mediævally called *stupor mundi*. The stupors of my prosodic world are not few, but there are moments in which I am inclined to put Erasmus Darwin in the curial position, though with somewhat different reasons for stupefaction. To perform the rite duly, Erasmus should be studied in the original quarto<sup>1</sup> published by Blake's publisher (so far as he had any besides himself), and to crown and culminate the whole tremendous irony, partly illustrated by Blake himself. The frontispiece is not Blake's engraving, though it is Fuseli's work, and that eccentric Swiss has here confined his eccentricity to making the plate just a little too big for the page, so that a small slice of it has to be doubled up, and (more commendably) to a rather striking suggestion of a gnome breaking through the ground and offering rings to Flora, who is being attired by the Elements. Flora, a plain person with a long yet slightly *retroussé* nose, is twisting herself in a very uncomfortable attitude, grabbing, without regarding them, at the fruits tendered by Earth, but eagerly looking at her plain self in a mirror presented by Fire, while Air, with a butterfly-winged hat of startling modernity, is sniggering quite intelligibly over the goddess's curls, and Water, the best of the group, is contemplating it with an expression apparently meant to say, "*What* a set you are!" "Emma Crewe" did a much prettier and not nearly so silly Flora playing with Cupid as frontispiece for the second, and Flaxman contributed some of those stately and impressive but rather bloodless compositions of his which always make one think of heroes in the Land of Shadows. But as you turn over the pages you come to something with Fuseli's name in the left-hand corner, but with "W Blake, sc" at the right, and certainly suggesting the genial as well as eccentric Helvetian's remark that Blake was "—— good to steal from." Colossus-wise, an enormous Anubis bestrides the Nile, his back to the

<sup>1</sup> The complete quarto London, Johnson 1791

spectator, pyramids at his right foot, and a great *sistrum* dropped on the bank at his left, his dog-face uplifted unseen, and his hands raised above it in prayer, while below and beyond a huge vague figure, with outstretched wings and arms, and looking as if, conventionalised a little, it had stepped out of the *Book of Urizen*, fills the background with thunder, lightning, and with rain till the cataracts start the river itself. I do not know whether the artist's original drawing for this exists. I do know that it makes me look wistfully for the engraver's undulating scrawls of letterpress, with something about Enitharmon or Luvah or Urizen himself, to make it all clear and comfortable. This is what we find instead

Sailing in air, when dark Monsoon enshrouds  
His tropic mountains in a night of clouds,  
Or drawn by whirlwinds from the Line returns,  
And show'rs o'er Afric all his thousand urns,  
High o'er his head the beams of Sirius flow,  
And, Dog of Nile, Anubis barks below  
Nymphs<sup>1</sup> you from cliff to cliff attendant guide  
In headlong cataracts the impetuous tide

It is impossible not to think that good Dr Darwin must have turned with a slight sigh to the frontispiece, and thought how much nicer it would have been to have had some more nymphs, with fruits and flowers and baskets and mirrors and giggles, and a neat Sphinx and a ditto Memnon, and everything handsome as he had himself defined it. As he says a little lower

So in green vales, amid her mountains bleak,  
Buxtonia smiles, the Goddess-Nymph of Peak

Why not give us Buxtonia smiling, instead of this great straddling monster?

It is, of course, quite easy to make fun of Darwin—though, by the way, it is uncritical to put his transition from hero to butt to the credit of *The Loves of the Triangles*. Parody never killed—it never even for any length of time injured—anything that had not the seeds

<sup>1</sup> Fuseli and Blake have not given their poor poet a single "nymph"!



of death and disease in itself. But we are here concerned, if not solely with his versification, yet with his diction and substance only as they are connected with it. Now, unfortunately, *The Loves of the Triangles* itself is not more of a parody and a reduction *ad absurdum* of the style of Darwin than *The Botanic Garden* is a parody and a reduction *ad absurdum* of the style which (since we have in the last volume taken every care to prevent an unfair and injurious misunderstanding of that shortened expression) may be called for shortness "the style of Pope," of the metrical end and aim of everything from *The Dispensary* onward for all but a hundred years. In fact, the great charm of Canning's performance is that it is not a caricature of Darwin, but a caricature of the standard couplet of the entire eighteenth century. The subject matters very little: it is the form that is reduced to the absurd, with its "gradus epithet," its stiff corset of pause and cadence, its cut and dried vocabulary, its obligatory periphrasis and personification. When even Cowper could call Darwin's verse "strong, learned, and sweet," even if we allow a certain possible double meaning for "learned," there is nothing more to be said.

Hayley

If the accident, or almost accident, of Blake's engraving throws up the quality of *The Botanic Garden*, the contrast becomes more insistent and more comical still when one turns to *The Triumphs of Temper*. That attempt "to raise the dignity of a declining art," of which "a few partial friends" asserted that when compared with Tassoni it had "some degree of similar merit," appeared, indeed, nearly twenty years before Blake was fetched down to Felpham to illustrate the *Ballads on Anecdotes of Animals*. But, for its own greater bad luck, it just preceded the *Poetical Sketches*. Let us give Hayley at his most ambitious, the opening of Canto V. It will be observed that there is nothing of the mock-heroic here:

Why art thou fled, O blest poetic time?  
When Fancy wrought the miracles of rhyme,  
When, darting from her star-encircled throne,  
Her poet's eye commanded worlds unknown

When, by her fiat made a mimic god,  
 He saw existence waiting on his nod,  
 And at his pleasure into being brought  
 New shadowy hosts—the vassals of his thought,  
 In Joy's gay garb, in Terror's dread array,  
 Darker than night and brighter than the day,  
 Who at his bidding thro' the wilds of air  
 Raised willing mortals far from earthly care,  
 And led them wondering thro' his wide domain  
 Beyond the bounds of Nature's narrow reign,  
 While their rapt spirits, in the various flight,  
 Shook with successive thrills of new delight

This last line is really not bad of the rest there is literally nothing special or positive to say

I do not think there is anything recorded (there is nothing in Boswell) as to Johnson's knowledge or opinion of these *Triumphs*, but he could certainly, on his own principles, have found no fault with their form. It is, on the accepted principles of the time, perfectly faultless, it is, on the principles which ought to be accepted through all time, "faultlessly null"

It is pretty generally agreed that, whatever may have been the badness of Gifford's temper and manners, it was to a certain extent excused by the folly of his victims. But though the "cankered carle" would probably have put me in the *Baviad* for saying so, I am bound to say that prosodically he is of very small account. In fact, a couplet of his own—

Happy the soil where bards like mushrooms rise,  
 And ask no culture but what Bysshe supplies,

goes into his own hand and pierces it so far as prosody is concerned. Bysshe is his "cultivator" there. The mechanical couplet—we have acknowledged it often—is better for satire than for anything else. Gifford was thoroughly acquainted with all its masters from Jonson to Pope, and he "beats it out, beats it out, with a clank for the stout," as well as Joe Gargery could desire in the one way, or Bysshe himself in another. But it has nearly as little quality as Hoole's own, and it shows, as glaringly as Darwin or Hayley, the need that this kind of verse

should go on furlough, if not the advisability of breaking it up and reforming it altogether<sup>1</sup>

Still Gifford's verse is at any rate "manly, sir, manly," if of a very commonplace and Philistine type of manliness. That of his victims, and that of most of his contemporaries, except the great quartette, has little of the man, though much of the fribble, and whether written by men or women is as flimsy as it is machine-made. Let us take, for example, the *British Album* itself,<sup>2</sup> with Della Crusca leaning his head on his hand in the frontispiece of one volume, and Anna Matilda's looks commercing with an unseen admirer (I presume) to the right of the spectator, in the other. Let us reinforce it with the *Poems*<sup>3</sup> of Helen Maria Williams—when she was fresh from those compliments of Dr Johnson's, which, if he had lived a little longer, would certainly have been changed into language frightful to hear, when she was still loyal, when she dedicated to Queen Charlotte two little volumes—full half of the first of which is occupied by a distinguished list of subscribers, including a solid portion of the peerage, heavy contingents from either bench, and a great multitude of dons, ladies, knights, esquires, doctors of physic, and barristers-at-law. Helen Maria, who may have the *pas* because she was once pretty and good, and even apparently not always silly, wrote a tolerable hymn or two in the days before she threw her bonnet over the mill and put on a Cap of Liberty instead. But, according to the odd law noticed in the last volume, her profane poems were very inferior

Helen Maria  
Williams

<sup>1</sup> The tempting subject of the other (chiefly political) satirists of 1780-1800 must be merely glanced at, though if any one will in his turn glance at an essay, "Twenty Years of Political Satire," contributed to *Macmillan's Magazine* in March 1890, and reprinted in *Essays in English Literature* (Second Series, London, 1895), he will see that my passing them over is not due to ignorance or want of interest. The prosodic part of the matter is excellently furnished, from Wolcot and the *Rollad* to Canning and Frere. Canning especially is quite diabolically expert at all his weapons, from the mock-starchiest iambic to the anapest in its most acrobatic attitudes and altitudes. But, as we saw in the last volume, there was nothing *very* new in this—though certainly it would be difficult to find earlier things quite so exquisitely high-junkative in motion as the Elegy on Jean Bon Saint-André, and the Song of Rogero, and the immortal celebration of "pithos and bathos delightful to see."

<sup>2</sup> Third edition, 2 vols., London, 1790

<sup>3</sup> London, 1786

to her sacred It is hard to say whether the couplets of the text of her *Peru*, or the quatrains of its Dedication to Mrs Montagu, show the imperative need of a break-up most Her irregular "Fragment" is machine-made Gray or double-shoddied Mason Her epistle to "Zeluco" Moore consists of the most insignificant octosyllables that one could easily find and her common measure for once justifies the (as a whole) most unjust judgment of Miss Julia Dabney (*v inf*<sup>1</sup>) as to the relative virtues of that metre Now all these are, once more, as the regular prosodic books go, absolutely faultless It is very difficult to read them with much attention through, but I do not think that there is a syllable too much or too little, a "wrenched accent," a false rhyme, an eccentric pause, a licentious overrunning, anywhere in them Yet these numbers, so carefully fulfilled, are utterly numb and dumb they have absolutely nothing to convey to us that might not be conveyed by the same words arranged as prose, or as verse different from that actually adopted They reduce prosody and versification, as nearly as possible, to an absolute blank There is, at any rate, more variety and positive quality in the co-operative efforts of "Della Crusca, Anna Matilda, Laura, Arley, Benedict, Cesario, The Bard, etc etc"<sup>2</sup> These last ampersands are not to be neglected, for some of their works (as presumably the unsigned pieces are) be very precious

The curious thing is that though, like the people of <sup>The Della</sup> Paraguay, they mostly "continue idiots," their <sup>Cruscans</sup> ~~idiotic~~ waters are now and then ~~half-angelically troubled~~ after a fashion for which we shall look in vain in their far from idiotic consor, in vain in respectable poetasters like Hayley and Darwin and Helen Maria "A Tale of Jealousy"—the work of one of the etceteras apparently—is the most dreadful rubbish, Monk-Lewis-and-water-moistened, a compost in which any brisk young person

<sup>1</sup> Chapter on American Prosodists

<sup>2</sup> This string actually occurs on the title page of the *Album*, though, from Meriv's prominence, the whole book is not uncommonly spoken of as "Della Crusca"

could grow three-pound-ten's worth (I do not know what is the present price, but this is what it used to be) of sarcastic review or "middle" with an hour or two's not disagreeable exertion<sup>1</sup> But in the middle of it comes this stanza

Th' awaken'd night with streaks of gold  
Her jetty robes began to lace  
Her drowsy car far off she rolled,  
*The blithe Sun urging to the race*

Not much to be said for it as a whole, though there is a convalescent attempt at a conceit But look at that fourth line Bysshe, with whose teachings Gifford reproached them, Gifford himself, Darwin, Hayley, Helen Maria, would have shunned, or at least have been afraid of, the presence of a word which almost insists on stress like "Sun" in the third place, especially between two such exceptionally "long" syllables as "blithe" and "urge" You can't disaccent the Sun he will not stand it But give him his proper weight and length, and he makes, though in such odd company, a better line than you will easily find in all the gentlemen and ladies just enumerated

It must be admitted that this is something of a chance-medley. Della Crusca (Merry) and Anna Matilda (Mrs Cowley, who, as in the *Belle's Stratagem*, had her moments of *not* being an idiot) give us, I think, nothing of this kind Their amœbean octosyllables are as destitute of the slightest redeeming metrical quality as Helen Maria's own, and a great deal sillier If anybody wants to see the heroic quatrain—which Dryden had nearly perfected in one direction, and Gray quite in another—reduced to the lowest grovel and drivel, let him read Merry on *Werter*, or on Fontenoy *He* is a little better in some arrangements of lyric sixes, but *her* half-systematised Pindarics, "Invocation to Horror," have been

<sup>1</sup> When I wrote this I was not aware that the late Mr. Armine Kent had, as long ago as 1885, written an article, reprinted in his posthumous *Oria* (London, 1905), on the subject But this was a full magazine paper—though, oddly enough, Mr. Kent afterwards came to write articles of the kind referred to in the text

misdelivered at the house of Derision.<sup>1</sup> All the same, in one of her own inconceivable phrases, her "Lyre," like his, "*correctly flings*"<sup>2</sup> And the praise bestowed upon Miss Williams is Merry's also. If they loved political anarchy, they adored and served prosodic correctness. As far as I have ever read Merry's tragedy *Ambitious Vengeance*, I have not found a line theoretically wrong—or practically right.

And so it is with the others. "Arley" (Miles Peter Andrews, playwright and powder-maker) must have been an amazing simpleton, yet even Ben could not have hanged him for not keeping of accent, and he might have written securely, if he had been a contemporary, "Lines on seeing Dr Donne go to Tyburn." The sonnets of "Benedict" (I forget who Benedict was) are feeble stuff enough as far as matter goes, but when "Arley" was actually calling collections of "long measure" by the name, and when Bowles had scarcely published, they are very fairly exact representatives of the English form. "The Bard," otherwise<sup>3</sup> "The Charming Man," otherwise Edward Jerningham, is a bard correct down to spelling "violet" "vi'let," lest he exceed syllabically. "Emma" and "Laura" and "Henry" too are well-conducted persons who would be pained by a reversal of stress, and horrified at a trisyllabic foot. In fact, in this dead season of poetry, just before the *renouveau*, the principles of verse, according to the composition books, are as well known as the multiplication table, and quite as commonly observed.

These things are, and could hardly but be, a sign Moral of this

- <sup>1</sup> Horror! I call thee from the *mould'ring tower*,  
The *murky churchyard* and *forsaken bower*,  
Where 'midst unwholesome damps  
The vap'ry gleaming lamps  
Of *ignes fatui* shew the thick-wove night,  
Where morbid Melancholy sits,  
And weeps and sings and raves by fits,  
And to her bosom strains the fancied sprite

- <sup>2</sup> "A feast so dear to polished taste  
As that thy Lyre correctly flings"

(B A 1 101)

- <sup>3</sup> As he appears in Horace Walpole's letters to the Berry

Political tyrannies, it was said famously, come to end when cobblers begin to be afraid, prosodic ones are in most danger when poetasters delight in obeying. But there was much more omen of change abroad than this indirect and negative symptom. Even in the poor creatures just mentioned the appetite for ballad measure, though for a miserably insipid form of it, is noticeable. Everybody took more and more the opportunities that offered themselves for Ansteyish anapæsts, and by degrees Monk Lewis<sup>1</sup> and others applied the metre to serious, or at least would-be tragical and would-be passionate subjects, in imitation, doubtless, of the Germans. But this German influence<sup>2</sup> was also art and part—it was, in fact, the main, though not the sole agent—in a far more serious and deliberate revolt against the rhymed couplet than any of these things, or even than the constantly increasing fancy for blank verse which took a fresh date from the popularity of Cowper.

Attempts at  
rhymelessness This was the attempt to write rhymeless metre in other than decasyllabic form. It had two divisions. The first was the attempt to revive the English hexameter, the second, to start rhymeless measures in English rhythm not limited to “tens”

The  
hexameter

The first was, if not exactly the more important (we shall make this restriction good later), by far the most continuous, obtrusive, and debated. There has practically been no cessation of attempts to get the dactylic hexameter to work in our language for more than a hundred years, that is to say, for the entire nineteenth century, and for as many years that side of it as this. It will, therefore, be best to treat these also continuously in a chapter towards the end of this history, and merely to point out here that the origin, if not the persistence, of these attempts must have been partly due to the time being “couplet-sick”

Rhymeless  
Pindarics

The writing of rhymeless Pindarics—as they may perhaps best be called, that is to say, of staves varied in

<sup>1</sup> Who, for some more modern touch in him, is reserved to the next chapter

line-length but destitute of rhyme—has been much less continuous, and there has been very much less of it. But we have seen a considerable revival of it recently, some attempt was made at an earlier time, in the middle of the nineteenth century, while towards the meeting of the eighteenth and nineteenth, and a little after it, a deliberate, determined, and vigorous effort was made in its favour, resulting, besides minor things, in the two principal poems of substance and length which employ it in English—Southey's *Thalaba* and Shelley's *Queen Mab*.

The attempt to avoid rhyme in other forms than in the common blank verse, without attempting classical metres, was of course no new thing, and we have registered its principal appearances. But the person to whom the revived cult of it towards the period just mentioned is due, and so the begetter, if not the author, of the two remarkable pieces just mentioned, was Frank Sayers, a member of the half-famous literary coterie which long existed at Norwich, a physician by profession, but a man of varied antiquarian and literary interests, a poet in his way, and a diligent though not copious writer of "Disquisitions." Of these he published a volume in 1793, containing among other things one on English metre, which William Taylor omitted from the *Collective Works*,<sup>1</sup> in pursuance of Sayer's own omission of it in a second edition of 1808. The omission was not improbably due to the fact that the original disquisition was, as Taylor puts it, "connected with the defence" of the author's own *Dramatic Sketches* "against some remarks of the periodic critics,"—perhaps also to the fact that in the meantime *Thalaba* had somewhat antiquated his appeal. It is a very short paper, and contains more citation than argument: the authors and poems appealed to being Peele in the "Complaint of CEnone," the "Mourning Muse of Thestylis," attributed then to Spenser, Sidney himself, Milton, Watts, Collins's "Evening," and the choruses of Glover's *Medea*.

<sup>1</sup> Two vols., Norwich, 1823. Observe "Collectree." It was a point of honour with Taylor to say nothing as other people said it.



The excellent and marvellously-styled Taylor thought the *Sketches* "an imperishable monument of British Poetry," and a German named Neubeck, who translated them,<sup>1</sup> considered them "full of overpowering beauties" As a matter of fact, there is very little poetry, and that of the mildest kind, in Sayers "The Descent of Frea" (he had not only been introduced by Taylor to the German, which that good person had "pervasively studied," but by Percy and Mallet to things farther north) is rhymed But in *Moina*, a "British tragedy," the choruses are blank, and there is no doubt that such things as that which comes at p 43<sup>2</sup> not merely supply a valuable symptom now, but exerted a powerful influence then To do Sayers justice, he has evidently taken great pains to observe *scale*, and to avoid that perpetual suggestion of colloped and sippeted blank verse which, as we shall see, dogs the style But where he succeeds it is generally at the cost of anything like melody It is really, what good blanks had been falsely called, "measured prose" And when his subject or something else brings music to him, back there come with it the chopped and twisted blanks<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There was a great deal of this translation going on in both directions, and it may be remembered, to the credit of a certain Dr Julius, that he translated "The Tiger" and other things of Blake's long before they were well known in England

<sup>2</sup> Hail to her whom Frea loves,  
Moina, hail !  
When first thine infant eyes beheld  
The beam of day,  
Freia from Valhalla's groves  
Mark'd thy birth in silent joy,  
Freia, sweetly smiling, saw  
The swift wing'd messenger of love  
Bearing in her rosy hand  
The gold-tipt horn of gods

<sup>3</sup> Page 84

Dark, dark is Moina's bed,  
On earth's hard lap she lies  
[Where is the beauteous form  
That heroes loved ?]  
[Where is the beaming eye,  
The ruddy cheek ?]  
Cold, cold is Moina's bed,  
And shall no lay of death

The choruses of *Starno*<sup>1</sup> are also unrhymed and (naturally) those of the translation of *The Cyclops*. Sayers also attempted a regular ode to "Night," on the exact pattern of Collins, a sort of prosodic "tracing" in forcible-feeble diction<sup>2</sup>, and he also wrote no inconsiderable amount of ordinary rhymed verse in various forms of perfectly ordinary eighteenth-century quality, some sonnets, some Spenserians, and a fair amount of (again ordinary) blanks. But he seems to have either instinctively or intentionally eschewed the couplet—a symptom again. At any rate he is the founder and father of the attempts in un-rhyme during the past century.

The amiable though far from over-stimulating Bowles<sup>3</sup> Bowles deserves a place here, as will be anticipated, not quite solely, but mainly, for his Sonnets. The blank verse of his longer poems is indeed by no means contemptible as verse, for it has shaken off the Miltonic affectations of Cowper, and has an excellent variety of run and mould. The want of idiom and distinction in his diction, and the commonplaceness of his thought, are what prevent Bowles from ranking among really poetic poets. It is interesting to note that, though an apostle of varied pause, he was by no means fond of extreme enjambment, and he has a curious fling at it in one of his later prefaces<sup>4</sup>.

[With pleasing murmur soothe  
Her parted soul?]  
[Shall no tear wet the grave  
Where Moina lies?]  
The birds shall raise the cry of death,  
The birds shall soothe her parted soul,  
[And drop the tear of grief  
On Moina's grave.]

\* It will be observed that each of the couplets enclosed in square brackets is simply a blank-verse line, arbitrarily split.

<sup>1</sup> The name is Ossianic. Sayers speaks guardedly of the "works attributed to Ossian", but I have no doubt that the immense influence of Macpherson (*v. Excursus inf.*) had a good deal to do with his rhymelessness.

<sup>2</sup> Hither, O queen of Silence, turn the steeds,  
The slow paced steeds that draw thy ebony car,  
And heave athwart the sky  
Thy starry studded veil

<sup>3</sup> *Complete Poems*, ed. Gilfillan, 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> That to *Banwell Hill* (1829), which is of some prosodic interest.

But in prosody as in poetry generally, those fourteen sonnets, which distress of mind and desire of money<sup>1</sup> made him compose and offer in the year of the French Revolution to a bookseller, estate him, with next to no other title, but securely. How they affected Coleridge almost everybody knows, it is a not unimportant piece of evidence in the question whether Southey took his interest in *Prosodia Liberata* from Coleridge or not, that he felt this influence just after he left Westminster and therefore *before* he met Coleridge, and it was widely shared. No doubt their tone—the new interest in nature, scenery, and historical association, the still newer intensifying of this by the “pathetic fallacy”—did much. But we must not defraud the prosodic appeal of its rights. For just as this remarkable form was sovereign in the sixteenth century against loose doggerel, so it showed itself sovereign now against hide-bound couplet. The rhythm-scheme of Bowles’s attempts in it is not very strict,<sup>2</sup> but for that very reason it supplies a more serpentine and poly-rhymed paragraph of verse, with undulating motion and soft explosion of final music-echo, to contrast with the tick-tick and rattle-clatter of the couplet.

<sup>1</sup> See the interesting autobiographic Preface of 1837 for this and other matters referred to in the above paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> He says in the Preface above referred to: “I thought nothing about the strict Italian model: the verses naturally flowed in unpremeditated harmony as my ear directed.” As far as *consciousness* goes, he no doubt here formulates the usual fact.

## EXCURSUS ON *OSSIAN*

IF the introduction of *Ossian* into this history meant any attempt to meddle with the Macpherson problem at large, the present writer would simply "shudder and bolt." Fortunately it does not. There is, I believe, no point on which there is less dissidence between competent authorities than on this—that however much or however little influence actual Gaelic texts had upon *Fingal* and *Timora*, etc, the irregular prose-verse or verse-prose in which these productions are couched owes nothing to any Celtic source in point of form. Whether Macpherson was a patriotic and fortunate discoverer of things that had never been seen before, and were never to be seen again, or a pure forger, or only an extremely ingenious "faker" of a conglomerate of the genuine and the spurious,—all this matters to us not at all. What does matter to us is that his vehicle is somewhat remarkable in itself, is very much more remarkable in the influence which it exercised, and is perhaps most of all remarkable because of the testimony which it gives to the drift—the appetite—the desires of the time. The reader is already aware that I attach, rightly or wrongly, much more importance to this than to anything else, and quite infinitely more than to the expressed opinions of preceptist prosodists. For these are "what the soldier said," and nothing more, the other is evidence.

In the same way this long-suffering reader ought to be aware now (if he cares to be so) that much less importance is here attached to supposed "originals" in particular cases than to the said drift, appetite, tendency, manifesting itself in individuals as well as in groups or nations. Whether Macpherson had any one special archetype before him in arranging his blank verse, or measured prose, or whatever it is to be called, I do not know.<sup>1</sup> My excellent predecessor, Blair, writes merely as follows —

<sup>1</sup> The author himself, who whatever else he was, was beyond all doubt, an exceedingly clever man, takes good care to throw very little light on the matter in his Preface of 1773. But he gives a sample of "another poem" (*uno excusso non diffe' alter*) in prose and verse, the latter of which is in fair machine-made eighteenth-century couplet.

"The measured prose which he has employed possesses considerable advantages above any sort of versification he could have chosen. Whilst it pleases and fills the ear with a variety of harmonious cadences, being at the same time freer from constraint in the choice and arrangement of words, it allows the spirit of the original to be exhibited with more justness, force, and sublimity." He rather pities "the poet" for being stripped of his native dress, "divested of the harmony of his native numbers," but urges that "if he still has power to please," he must be an uncommon genius.

What Macpherson's own words do show beyond reach of scepticism is that he felt the want of "simplicity and energy" in the verse of his time and though he also speaks, in the cant phrase, of "the fetters of rhyme," there can be no hesitation in assigning his decision, in part at least, to the misgivings which we have traced, and are tracing, as to the artificiality and the feebleness of the couplet—misgivings which, *mutatis mutandis* as to the actual form, were spreading all over Europe, and were showing themselves in a dozen different ways.

Macpherson's way may have been suggested to him by more originals than one or two, but there is, I think, little reason to doubt that the most important influence of all was that of the English Bible in such passages as the Song of Deborah, the Lament of David for Jonathan, nearly the whole of the Book of Job, and large portions of the prophets, especially Isaiah. I do not know what his knowledge of foreign and classical languages was, but certainly any *literal* translation of a Greek chorus, even any one of an Italian *canzone*, might have given him hints. And I do not know that he did not take some from English Pindaric, the popularity of which had not wholly waned when he began. His chief special secret, as it seems to me, is the sharp and absolute isolation of sentences of unequal length. There is hardly anywhere, in verse or prose, a style so resolutely *cumulative*, while maintaining such complete want of connection between the constituents of the heap. Each sentence conveys its meaning completely—as far as it goes.<sup>1</sup>

I do not think that Macpherson has any special moulds or types of rhythm. As this sort of writing practically must do in English (and as, we see, Blake's borrowing of it did much more), it not unfrequently slips into fourteener

The king alone no gladness shewed, no stranger he to war

*Temora*, bk vi p 119

And actual blank verse is, of course, still more inevitable "Six-

<sup>1</sup> My references are to the "new edition" (2 vols., London, 1796)

teeners" or flattened out octosyllabic couplets, also frequent in Blake, are common

Tall Morla came, the son of Swarth, and stately strode the youth along  
*Fingal*, bk ii p 227

But the effect is best when these definite crystallisations of metre are avoided and the prose is left to run merely rhythmically. Even in these the *decoying* character of metre is evident—the way in which, if you venture on its inchoate stage of rhythm, you are drawn to complete the whole. For instance, in one passage you get, if you reverse the order as follows, simply the half of an anapaestic stanza, like "Come into the garden, Maud"

And the lake is settled and blue in the vale  
When the sun is faint on its side<sup>1</sup>

*Fingal*, bk iii p 239

<sup>1</sup> Here is a similar one in the right order

When it shews its lovely head on the lake,  
And the setting sun is bright

*Carrie-Thura*, i 49

In fact the combination is frequent three pages farther you find

By the mossy fountain I will sit  
On the top of the hill of wind,

and in *Carthon*, p 73

When the sky pours down its flaky snow,  
And the world is silent and dark

Indeed, I have found dozens of them and still more single groups of three foot anapaests. And here are some others in which the slightest change, or hardly any, or none at all, makes obvious metre —

[Oct quatrain]

Thy hand [it] touched the trembling harp  
Thy voice was soft as summer winds  
Ah me! what shall the heroes say?  
For Dargo fell before a boy

Note to *Calthon and Colmal*, i 132

[C M with rhyme, changing only plural for singular Note trisyllabic foot]

The waves dark-tumble on the lake,  
And hush its rocky side[s]  
The boat is brimful in the cove,  
The oars | on the rock | ing tide

*Croma*, p 122

[Complete "Moorish melody," with slightest change]

She turns | her blue eyes | toward the fields | of his pro|nise  
[gathers]

Where art | thou O Fin|gal? the night is gathering round<sup>1</sup>

*Comala*, p 36

The opening of *Carthon*—

A tale of the times of old | the deeds of the days of other years  
may have suggested<sup>1</sup> the seven-foot anapaestic rhythm of the *French Revolution* to Blake

Perhaps the form is at its happiest—which will not surprise us, dates and other circumstances considered—when it is least rhythmical and hardly metrical at all, such as in the passages at the beginning of the short poem “Calthon and Colmal,” above cited. In fact, there are places where Macpherson, intentionally or by oversight, drops his “measure” altogether, as, for instance, in this sentence from “Cathlin of Clutha” (p. 159)

The stranger stood by a secret stream, where the foam of Rathcol skirted  
the mossy stones

Of course you can, if you insist upon it, scan

The stran|ger stood | by a se|cret stream ,

but it is not natural in the context, and the whole cadence of the sentence is of “the *other* harmony of prose,” not the poetic or the mixed. And you will not uncommonly find entire passages of a very similar complexion.

But there is no doubt that, as the importance of *Ossian* for us consists wholly, so its importance for its own audience consisted very mainly, whatever good Dr Blair might say, in its hybrid prose-poetic vehicle, in the poetic licences (especially the inversion) of its diction, and in the resounding barbaric-poetic proper names. Even this last was a feature of the rising disloyalty to the principles and practice of neo-classic writing. It is true that Pope had not adopted, in so many words, Boileau’s almost incredulous horror at “Childebrand,” but he, and still more the Popelings, were really penetrated by it. Now “Oscar” and “Malvina” and “Crimora” and “Carric-I-thura” and “Starno” are prosodic factors in their own way, and they had almost as much to do as the mists and the tree-rustling and the torrent-foam with the production of that romantic—if rococo-romantic—influence which “*Ocean*” undoubtedly exercised on its own, and still more on the following generation.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FIRST ROMANTIC GROUP (THE LAKE POETS, SCOTT, MOORE, LANDOR, ETC)

Possible influences—Southey—His early perception of true doctrine—His practice in Ballad—*Thalaba*—*Kehama*—Coleridge—The *Christabel* manifesto—Its looseness of statement—His prosodic *opinions* not clear—Supreme importance of his prosodic *practice*—*Kubla Khan*—*The Ancient Mariner*—Recent ballad metre—*Christabel*—Wonderful blunders about it—His other prosodic titles—Wordsworth his theories on poetic diction—On “harmony of numbers”—His actual prosodic quality—The prosody of the *Immortality* ode—An interlude of skirmish—Scott—His relation to *Christabel*—His other narrative metres—His lyric—His critics—Special relation of Moore’s prosody to music—The lesson of “Eveleen’s Bower”—Landor his ordinary prosody—That of his “epigrams”—Rogers—Campbell—Mat Lewis

If I were to say that the mighty change which came upon English poetry about the meeting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was very mainly a prosodic change, I might seem to be exposing myself to the jibe, “There is nothing like leather”<sup>1</sup> It was, of course, much more than prosodic in some cases, such as Wordsworth’s, the prosodic element was accidentally or intentionally kept in the background, and in others, though much attention was paid to it, that attention was not always according to knowledge But the general truth of the statement made above remains It will be better

<sup>1</sup> I do not deny that the poet is born, but I am sure that Prosodia is one of the chief, if not *the* chief, of the mysterious group of goddesses that preside at—and before—that birth



to establish it by actual process of survey than to "argufy" about it generally beforehand

saible  
fluences.

We have seen how, in Chatterton to a remarkable extent at the time when most of the poets now to be discussed were being born, and still more in Blake when they were scarcely in the schoolroom, the principle of free substitution of trisyllabic for dissyllabic feet, in metres dissyllabic in staple, is present. It is present in both unquestionably, and in Blake constantly. How much in each was mere happy following of the elders, how much original genius, how much almost accident, how much deliberate practice resting on something like theory, it is impossible to say. Chatterton had no time to record reflections which he may very likely have made, and Blake, though he had plenty of time, was "dictated to" about other matters. But Chatterton's practice must have been known to all the great men of whom we are about to speak, while Blake's was certainly and perhaps early known and appreciated by Southey and by Lamb, and was probably communicated by one of them to Wordsworth and Coleridge, though there is no evidence, I think, that Scott shared their knowledge. But all the Four, with Lamb and others, knew their Elizabethan drama well, and you cannot read the Elizabethan drama, with eyes not blinkered by theory, and fail to see the trisyllable and its virtue.

Whether Coleridge or Southey first appreciated the principle is, I believe, impossible to determine. One is accustomed—in most cases no doubt rightly—to regard Coleridge as the fount and original of his friends' ideas, and of course *Christabel* is a great document to "put in." But *Christabel*, early as it is in its original form, was a good deal subsequent to his acquaintance with Southey, and while Southey's practice in ballad-writing is known to be at least as early as 1796—two years before the *Ancient Mariner* and its group—his theory in a letter to Wynn, only three years afterwards, is expressed in a manner quite unlike Coleridge's later formulated precept in *Christabel* itself. It is also very much nearer the

actual truth, though it is informally and casually put, and certainly does not look as if it could be a possible transliteration of any hints received from the greater poet. For prosodic purposes, therefore, it will probably be safe to take the four in this order—Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott. And I do not think that I shall be really guilty of confusion if, following out the principles which have been announced in my Prefaces, I take the prosodic practice and precepts of all four together, in each case, reserving Southey's share in the hexameter business for the special chapter on that subject. For this last is a matter where the malt of theory and preceptism is altogether above the meal of poetry. People have written English hexameters because they had a theory that they might be written. I cannot believe that anybody ever spontaneously wrote them, and then made a theory to explain the practice. In real English verse-writing we know it to have been almost invariably the other way.

Southey's letter to Wynn<sup>1</sup> is dated Bristol, April 9, Southey 1799, while Coleridge was still in Germany, and before the restoration of intercourse between the two which resulted in "The Devil's Walk." Nor had the greater poet written any one of his diploma-pieces in equivalence before the rupture. Written as it was privately to the oldest and most intimate of Southey's friends, it is a perfectly trustworthy document, and it is very interesting to observe that "accent" is not even mentioned in it. The subject, it may be barely desirable to say, is his own volume of *Ballads*, etc., which had just been published.

"And now I proceed to the indictment of my ears. If the charge had come from Dapple it would not have surprised me. One may fancy him possessed of more than ordinary susceptibility of ear, but for the irritability of yours, I cannot so satisfactorily account. I could heap authority on authority for using two very short syllables in blank verse instead of one—*thy take up*

His early  
perception of  
true doctrine

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Warton (London, 1856), i. 69

only the time of one<sup>1</sup> 'Spirit' in particular is repeatedly placed as a monosyllable in Milton, and some of his ass-  
 editors have attempted to print it as one, not feeling that  
 the rapid pronunciation of the two syllables does not  
 lengthen the verse more than the dilated sound of one.  
 The other line you quote is still less objectionable,  
 because the old ballad style requires ruggedness, *if this  
 line were rugged*,<sup>1</sup> and secondly, because the line itself  
 rattles over the tongue as smoothly as a currie upon  
 down-turf

I have made cāndles of infānt's fāt

This kind of cadence is repeatedly used in the *Old  
 Woman* and in the 'Parody' "

The quantification, it should be observed, is original,  
 and practically disposes of the possible objection that  
 Southey does not specify "feet"—an omission (if it be  
 an omission at all) doubtless due to the fact that he was  
 writing informally to a friend, and not formally for the  
 public. He may have meant anapæsts, and he may  
 have meant dactyls, but when you once use longs and  
 shorts you mean and make *feet*, as that black pearl of  
 prosodists, Bysshe, right well did know

His practice  
 in Ballad

His practice had already long corresponded with his  
 theory, and the history of his reading (which is almost  
 the history of his life) accounts amply for it. As a boy  
 he had steeped himself in Spenser, and in other Eliza-  
 bethan and seventeenth-century writers, as a very young  
 man he had been caught at once by Sayers' *Dramatic  
 Sketches* and other unrhymed Pindarics, in 1793 and  
 1794 he had himself written unrhymed imitations—of  
 Collins, I suppose, in the first place. I do not know  
 in what particular ballads Wynn found the presence of  
 the trisyllabic foot to which he objected, but it occurs  
 repeatedly in "The Cross Roads," written at Westbury  
 (the Bristol Westbury) in 1798

But for all | the wealth | in Bris|tol town  
 I would not | be with | his soul,

<sup>1</sup> The italics added

where you can, of course, and may perhaps rightly, read "I'd," but cannot alter the line before Here are others in the same piece

Didst see a house beyond the hill  
Which the winds | and the rains | destroy ?

'Twere vain | to scream | and the dy|ing groan

• And it of|ten made | me wake | at night  
When I saw | it in dreams | again

The post | was driv|en in|to her breast,  
And a stone | is on | her face •

There are also abundant instances later

This frank acknowledgment of equivalence, both in *Thalaba* principle and practice, seems to me to be really Southey's great prosodic title, his share in the hexameter business being only rather questionable amusement, and his temporary devotion to rhymelessness a respectable mistake. But it cannot be denied that *Thalaba* is a considerable prosodic fact in itself, and that, with its pendant-contrast *Kehama*, it makes a striking prosodic lesson. One thing to be reckoned altogether to Southey's credit prosodically, in the devising of *Thalaba*, is that he saw, and deliberately set himself to avoid, the pit into which, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> his model Sayers fell before him, and into which, much longer after him, Mr Matthew Arnold was constantly tumbling. In the Preface to the fourth edition (for the poem was deservedly popular), written at Cintra in October 1800, he says that "no two lines are employed in sequence that can be read into one." He anticipates the objection that two six-syllable lines (which *are* to be met in sequence repeatedly) compose an Alexandrine, but retorts that the Alexandrine itself is "composed of two six-syllable lines," which is ingenious but not quite conclusive. However, *Thalaba* is entirely free from the reproach (to which, as we shall see, *The Strayed Reveller* is constantly open) of being a mere mess



<sup>1</sup> *Vide supra*, p. 40

of minced or colloped decasyllabic lines Another interesting thing in this Preface—a thing which supports the contention advanced in the last Book of the last volume and in this—is his avowal of his desire for something different from “the obtrusiveness, the regular jews’ harp *twing-twang*, of what has been foolishly called heroic measure” But he puts in, as he did frequently on other occasions, the *caveat* that he does not *prefer* his present vehicle to blank verse, which he thinks “the noblest measure of which our admirable language is capable”

There is no doubt that *Thalaba* contrasts effectively with his own blanks, which exist in immense numbers, which are never bad, but which rarely attain distinction It will be difficult to refuse that distinction to the opening stanza of *Thalaba*,<sup>1</sup> which attracted the direct imitation of Shelley, and to many another, such as one<sup>2</sup> on which I open at absolute haphazard and the first dip (bk vii st 6)

It is not a bad narrative medium, it is not flat, it is

<sup>1</sup> How beautiful is Night !  
A dewy freshness fills the silent air,  
No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,  
Breaks the serene of heaven  
In full orl'd glory yonder moon divine  
Rolls through the dark blue depths  
Beneath her steady ray  
The desert-circle spreads,  
Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky  
How beautiful is Night !

<sup>2</sup> Silent and calm the river rolled along  
And at the verge arrived  
Of that fur garden o'er a rocky bed,  
Toward the mountain base,  
Still full and silent, held its even way  
But farther as they went its deepening sound  
Louder and louder in the distance rose,  
As if it forced its stream  
Stungling through crags along a narrow pass  
And to ' where racing o'er a hollow course,  
The ever flowing flood  
Fours in a thousand whirlpools Thence, adown  
The perforated rock  
Plunge the whole waters so precipitous,  
So fathomless a fall,  
That their earth shaking roar came deepened up  
Like subterranean thunders

not monotonous, but the ear is perpetually unsatisfied Bread without butter, whitebait without its accessories, matches without heads, a piano with hammers but without wires—all these uncomfortable images suggest themselves constantly, except in places where the passage is so short and the situation so dramatic that rhyme would be almost out of place—as in the far- (and justly) famed

Who comes from the Bridal Chamber?  
It is Azrael, the angel of Death <sup>1</sup>

*Kehama*, which contrasts so strikingly with *Thalaba*, *Kehama* was actually begun within a very few months (May 1801) of the writing of this Preface, and it is not possible to read, without being struck by them, the remarks which the author, nearly forty years later, again makes, in the Preface of the collected edition, on the change of metre. He refers to *Thalaba*, and he does not say that he felt the want of rhyme there, nor does he say that he had mended the defect in *Kehama*. But he does say that he thought "the strain of poetry could not be pitched too high," that he "endeavoured to combine the utmost richness of versification," etc, in order to compensate for the extravagance and unfamiliarity of the story. So, then, we have testimony of the most valuable kind that rhyme is part, if not a necessary part, of "the highest strain of poetry," that it is part, if not a necessary part, of "the utmost richness of versification."

The result justifies the argument, for the form of *Kehama* is certainly superior to that of *Thalaba*. Macaulay may be right in his strictures on the want of character and passion, neither of these was ever Southey's strong point, and he has given more of both in *Thalaba* than here. It may be quite true also that the fantastic monstrosity of his subject required a vaguer and more Blake-like outline than he could possibly give. Other reasons, besides the general one that mankind will not

<sup>1</sup> I hope it is not impertinent to suggest that it is possible to spoil this couplet by making the second syllable of the dread angel's name long. Southey always values the word, I think, either as "Michael" is commonly pronounced or as "Raphael," i.e. with the vowels blended or the *a* shortened.

as a rule continue to read long poems, might be assigned for the increasing neglect. But if anybody denies that the *Curse* itself is a very fine piece of verse indeed, I am afraid I shall not even attempt to argue with him, but merely shrug my shoulders and pass by. The comparison<sup>1</sup> of the two long descriptions of Domdaniel, and of the "gem-lighted city" that delighted Landor, is even more instructive because more extensive. And I really do not know that any form could have better suited the stanza where Kailyal drinks from the Amreeta though of course, as in the case of the mysterious cup itself, the effect of the contents depends on the nature of the poet—or perhaps of the reader.

Little need be said on his other pieces, though they at least support the prerogative place which has here been given to him in respect of his prosodic standpoint. The mass of his longer compositions has been spoken of, it does not, from our point of view, help him much, but it certainly does not hinder. The beautiful and quite early "Holly Tree" (it dates, like the other piece quoted above, from the Westbury sojourn of 1798), which actually neutralised Hazlitt's venom at its most acrid,<sup>2</sup> adapts seventeenth-century form with singular and much more than mechanical success. The famous "Blenheim" piece has no silliness in its simplicity—you could not find a prosodic movement better suited to the theme or better utilised for it, and the "Lines written in a Library," which with these two are perhaps the only things of Southey's now generally known, deserve the same praise as that given to the "Holly Tree." He, perhaps more than any one else, started in his *Ballads* the elastic "Pindaric of anapæsts," which was to be taken up by Praed and perfected by Barham. But the rhymeless experiments, the hexametrical excursions to be dealt with later, and the early championship of equivalence are his main titles of entrance into a history of prosody, and the last is his title to a place of honour there.

<sup>1</sup> *Thalaba*, bks. II and XII, with *Kihama*, xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> See *The English Poets*, *sub fin*.

It may well seem imperative to begin any account of Coleridge as a prosodist with his famous manifesto-preface to *Christabel*, it might indeed seem positively impertinent to do anything else. It is, no doubt, true that he was some five-and-forty when he published it, that we do not know when it<sup>1</sup> was written, that it has (in the circumstances that we *do* know) a perilous suggestion of after-thought, and that, after its appearance, he wrote no verse of the first value. But, after all, it is not (like that other manifesto of Milton's which is its only counterpart) a palinode. It conflicts with nothing that he had said or done before. It might be intended to apply to the *Ancient Mariner* as well as to *Christabel*. On the whole, therefore, it may be well to start with it, to discuss it briefly in general, and then to take the work, partly in the light of it, partly not. It is as follows —

"The metre of the *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle, namely, that of counting, in each line, the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion"

Now, there is no piece of Coleridge's celebrated "f-f-f-fun" which is more complicatedly and dangerously funny than this. That the metre of *Christabel* is "founded on a new principle", that this principle is that of "counting in each line the accents, not the syllables", and that the variation is only used "in correspondence with some change or transition in the nature of the imagery or passion," are three statements of which the

The *Christabel*  
manifesto

<sup>1</sup> "It" refers here specially to the *Preface*. On the general questions, chronological and other, connected with the poem, reference should be made to Mr Ernest Coleridge's ed., with MS facsimiles, for the Royal Society of Literature (London, 1907). The most elaborate discussion (before that in the text) of the *metre* is Mr H. D. Bateson's (*v inf* in final chapter on Prosodists)



first always has been, and always must be, surprising, of which the second has been, and is, a disastrous stumbling-block, and of which the third is unnecessary, only now and then true, always incomplete, and sometimes false. That he can really have thought the principle of *Christabel* "new" in any other sense than that it was opposed to the prevailing doctrines of eighteenth and late seventeenth century prosody, is inconceivable. He did not know early Middle English poetry as Gray knew it, but he certainly knew the *Shepherd's Calendar*,<sup>1</sup> and of his own immediate predecessors and early contemporaries, he certainly knew Chatterton, he could hardly be ignorant of Burns, and it is at least probable that he knew Blake—all three of whom, as we have seen, use substitution in octosyllabic couplet more or less.<sup>2</sup> If he had never talked with Southey on the principle, which seems very unlikely, he certainly knew Southey's practice. The expression, therefore, can only be interpreted as implying that he had for the moment "decasyllabomania" and octosyllabomania generally in his head, and was announcing *Christabel* as a revolt against them, without enquiring too narrowly whether there had been any Wickif to his Luther or any Wat Tyler to his Long Parliament.

Its looseness  
of statement

So, too, the third statement (to pass over the second designedly) requires a good deal of qualification to make it go down. The substitution of a trisyllabic foot for a dissyllabic one in a particular place, or the multiplication of trisyllabic feet in a particular line or batch of lines, *may* "suit sound to sense" in the manner here suggested. And as even Johnson had admitted the excuse to some, though not to this extent—as it has a good, plausible sound about it, and falls in with the popular wish not to let questions of form have attention in preference to questions of matter,—it is quite possible that Coleridge

<sup>1</sup> For some remarks supplementary to those in vol. 1. on this, and on the notion that Spenser did not mean four foot lines, *v. inf. App. vi. § 1*.

<sup>2</sup> In Burns the trisyllabic feet are mainly, as Shenstone would say, "virtual." Yet in *Tam o' Shanter* he has more than once forgotten, or deliberately dropped, "apostrophation," and has left the extra syllable

put it forward, not dishonestly, but prudently, as a "practicable" buckler and mantlet for the innovation which, if it was not absolutely so, he knew or thought would be regarded as one. It is clear, however, that the pretext is not the real one—is not even universally applicable. If agreement with imagery is the thing aimed at, why is there no gallop in

The palfrey was as *fleet* as wind?

and why is it

And the Spring comes slowly up this way,

and not

The Spring comes ? •

The fact, of course, is that, though "imagery and passion" are reflected in the selection of feet and the length of the lines, as in the famous

Tu—whit—Tu—whoo,

and in

Beautiful exceedingly,

the moulding of the metre is to a very large extent determined by purely metrical considerations, by the desire to vary the music and to shape the paragraphs into irregular stanzas.

But the proposition as to which one must most fervently hope that Coleridge had not "ceased his fun-  
 ning" in affirming it—the proposition which, if he really meant it, would put him on the wrong side as a preceptist, though he must always remain in the vanguard of the right as a practitioner—is the second. If he really thought that, by observing your four accents, you might chuck syllables about from seven (*ty four* in the owl-cry) to twelve, anyhow and as you pleased, then it is to be feared that he almost brought himself under that uncomfortable Thirteenth Article of the Church, which declares that good works done not in the right spirit have the nature of sin. And a very unpleasant person, a Calvin or a Joseph Irons of prosody, might augur the worst of his future prospects from the fact that he *does* sometimes seem to go on the purely happy-go-lucky principle, as,

His prosodic  
*opinions* not  
 clear

for instance, in ll 443 to 447,<sup>1</sup> where it may be observed that not only does the concluding anapæstic couplet fit rather badly, but

From the bodies and forms of men,  
actually suggests *three* "accents" and an anapæstic base throughout

But "do not let us give way to such gloomy thoughts," as Mr Bennet said to his wife on an immortal occasion. For some reason or other, Coleridge's references to formal questions of prosody are few and unimportant they almost reduce themselves to this, and to his intromittings with hexameters, of which more elsewhere<sup>2</sup> The comparative reticence of the whole group—the reticence of men who must be about their real business of *doing*, and who can leave others to draw morals and make axioms and systems—is on him

Supreme im-  
portance of his  
prosodic  
practice

And he must be a very odd person who is not satisfied with this "doing" Coleridge's early verse is naturally not very different from late eighteenth-century verse generally, and his verse of dates later than the early nineteenth century calls for no notice as prosody, whether it is blank or couplet stanza or Pindaric, except that in the best examples, such as *Dejection* and *Love*, it has what only poetic spirit can give to poetic form But it is quite otherwise with the three wonder-works of the golden months of 1797-98 ✓

It has been disputed which of the three was first composed, but it matters little for any purpose, and for ours simply nothing Although nearly twenty years were to pass between the publication of *The Ancient Mariner* and that of *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*, they are practically inseparable in spiritual date and artistic identification

<sup>1</sup> From the bodies and forms of men<sup>1</sup>  
He spike his eye in lightning rolls !  
For the lady was ruthlessly seized , and he kenn'd  
In the beautiful lady the child of his friend

<sup>2</sup> His alleged dissatisfaction with Tennyson's verse might be taken as additional evidence that he had not thoroughly cleared up his mind on the subject, if it were not merely reported But, that being so, it will be better to take it with Tennyson himself.

*Kubla Khan* is perhaps the greatest, poetically, of the three. Indeed, it is not easy to think of a greater piece of poetry than *Kubla Khan*,<sup>1</sup> and the comparison of the opening strophe with its mother-passage in *Purchas* is almost a complete object-lesson of the difference between prose and poetry. But though it has not exactly the least prosodic interest, it has the least prosodic interest for us. It is, in point of form, simply an example, immensely improved in form itself, and charged with a double and tenfold portion of the poetic spirit, of the half-regular ode or lyric, the "broken and cuttit" verse. This, in a fashion, may be traced back almost to the point where English becomes English in the full sense, not "in a fashion," but unmistakably, and with no allowance, from the sixteenth century, through the seventeenth, onward. And it had been common enough in Pindaric and non-Pindaric shapes during the eighteenth itself. In other words, it is a *satura*, composed of batches of octosyllabic and decasyllabic verse, with rhyme arranged at discretion, and sometimes doubled, with rhythm varying, but not beyond the ranges of iamb and trochee. Such fingering of the general scheme had hardly been seen since *Comus* and *Lycidas* and the *Arcadis*, but the scheme could not, even to Coleridge himself, have seemed "new."

It is very different with *The Ancient Mariner* and with *Christabel*, and the difference, acknowledged in the latter case with whatever questionableness of detail, might almost have been claimed—perhaps was originally intended to be claimed—in the first.

The ballad metre was, of course, again in no sense

Recent ballad  
metre

<sup>1</sup> This statement is wont to upset some people terribly. A friend of mine, most right honourable in the literary sense, has said pl unctively, "Really, after all, the *Odyssey* is a greater poem than *K K*." Certainly it is—in the sense that the hogshead is a greater health than the nipperkin, but in no other. I once read a very clever paper in which the writer, taking the same side, asked passionately and repeatedly at the end, "Why are we to call *K K* 'pure poetry'?" Unluckily he had answered himself a dozen lines before, in the words, "The interest of *K K* is to find out how it produces a poetical effect—for it does—out of so little." We have found out—by adding to the little, to the almost nothing, of the opium dreams, the pure poetry of verse and diction and atmosphere generally.

"new" As we have seen in our first two volumes, it had never been abandoned since men first crumpled up the long face of the fourteener into this delightful *minors chiffonné*. But for a considerable time they had, even since it was taken into favour again, been endeavouring, except in the case of Burns and Blake, to smooth out the blessed creases and dimples into a "prunes and prism" uniformity. The abominably monotonous sing-song that resulted almost, or altogether, justified Johnson's parodies, and even when people dared to slip a little spirit and spring into the line, they seldom ventured to vary the stanza, though there were ample precedents of old. Even in the earlier eighteenth century itself, Hughes,<sup>1</sup> and others had seen something of the possibilities, while the popularity of the *romance-six* was another "lead." Add the resumption of internal rhyme, add a strong dose of archaic diction, not so well done at first as later<sup>2</sup> but in its final form almost impeccable, and it will be easily seen what more potent spirits Coleridge thus turned into the lethargic and lymphatic body of the ballad stanza, as practised even by the Goldsmiths and the Percies, much more by the Mickles and the Helen Marias. In fact, people did say, as usual in such cases, that "it had a devil." It shocked nearly everybody, even Southey himself, only inferior to Coleridge as a rejuvenator of the ballad—nay, even Wordsworth, joint author of the book and (though to an infinitesimal extent) of the poem.

In this case Voltaire's words certainly acquire a validity which the author of them would have been the first to disclaim. "C'est le diable au corps qu'il faut avoir." *The Ancient Mariner*, not *Christabel*, though by the advantage of accident only, is the match that kindled the torch of revived true English prosody, the knife that set the prisoner free, the mallet that knocked the block from the dog-shores and sent the ship careering into a sea

<sup>1</sup> See vol. II p. 504.

<sup>2</sup> It is well known that Coleridge at first archaized and Scotticized his vocabulary rather awkwardly, but mended this later.

hitherto silent, soon to be full of magical voices It is all so familiar now that unless the reader is either very ignorant, or rather unusually furnished with knowledge, he may hardly feel the astonishing *difference* of it

Undoubtedly the main "source" (as Longinus would say) of this difference is the use—the quite astoundingly accomplished and effective use—of the trisyllabic foot. The "accents," the "stresses," are exactly the same as in

I put my hat upon my head,  
And walked into the Strand,  
And there I met another man,  
Whose hat was in his hand

I do not know whether anybody has noticed that the almost uncanny panacea of the trisyllable will heal this famous thing itself to some extent

I *set*|*tled* my hat | on my *throb*|*bing*<sup>1</sup> head,  
And I walked | *out in*|to the Strand,  
And there | I met | *with* ano|ther man,  
Whose hat | was in | his hand

is infinitely superior It quite arouses one's interest as to what is going to happen in the Hat-Congress, which was before so obstinately dull and the unalterable last line acquires merit from the contrast and "pull-up"

Instead of the "butterwoman's rank to market" of the strict common measure, the interchanges of equivalent but not identical feet communicate quite a new music

It is an ancient mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three—  
"By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stop'st thou me?"

Let us apply the converse process to this

It is an ancient mariner,  
And he *stops* one of three—  
"By thy grey beard and *piercing* eye  
Now wherefore stop'st thou me?"

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<sup>1</sup> If "throbbing" is objected to as an illegitimate addition of subject attraction, try "curly," or "good baid," or even "on the top of" Anything that gives the trisyllabic effect will do



the normal verse-length<sup>1</sup> He wants a passage of suspense between the poem of the horror and its accomplishment, and a picture to "set" what is to come, and just the one sharp revulsion of rhythm—

The steersman's face | by his lamp | gleamed white,  
From the sails | the dew | did drip—

quickenings, in these the *only* trisyllabics, to the last clause, with the slow rise of the moon to light the death-throes of the crew, where the trisyllables thicken again as the souls flit past him

Like the whiz of my cross-bow!

It would be delightful to go through the poem in this fashion, but I have been rebuked for "amusing" and "indulging" myself with such things, and so I suppose I must leave it to the reader who pleases to amuse and indulge himself with the rest. He will find the labour easy and the reward great.

Of one sizing, however, I will not be stinted, and that is the opportunity of pointing out, here also, with what wretched and beggarly elements the accentual prosodists content themselves. According to them, whether in any of these cases three, or two, or one unaccented syllable or syllables come or comes between the accents does not much matter. We have shown that it matters vitally. In at least a large number of cases, if you lift the foot-block out, and replace it with even an equivalent block of different length, weight, and balance, you will spoil the line, if you muddle and disturb the correspondence or difference of these foot-blocks in lines which have to each other the relation of stanza-constituents, you will spoil the stanza. While as to the difference between these

<sup>1</sup> We listened and looked sideways up!  
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,  
My life blood seemed to sip!  
The stars were dim, and thick the night,  
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white,  
From the sails the dew did drip—  
Till clomb above the eastern bar  
The horned moon, with one bright star  
Within the netlier tip



living, breathing, various-vitalised lines and stanzas, and the dead lumps of common measure that with rare exceptions had preceded them for all but a century—their should be little need of emphasising *that*. It leaps to the eye, it rings or thuds at the ear

*Christabel*

Wonderful  
blunders  
about it

As for *Christabel*, something has been said already on the account which Coleridge gives of its prosody, but it remains to examine that prosody itself. Many astonishing things, only half or less than half justified by the Preface, and not in the least justified by the poem, have been said about this. One critic of repute has defied all his brethren to analyse its music. It has been said that “in it accents perform the work of feet” (a confusion so amazing that it is almost beyond the reach of analogical illustration), and that “the consideration of feet is dropped in it altogether,” whereas every syllable in *Christabel* can be assigned to its “proper-to-him” foot (as Reginald Pecock would say) as definitely as any syllable of a Greek chorus. It has been called “ballad metre” which has this exact amount of truth in it—and therefore this inexact amount of falsehood—that every line of *Christabel* is a possible ballad line, and that it opens with an irregular ballad stanza. But whereas the essence of ballad metre is unequal line-length and alternate rhyme, the essence of *Christabel* metre is equal line-length and couplet rhyme.

In other words, this metre is nothing more and nothing less than the old octosyllabic couplet with the fullest licence of equivalent substitution of feet, with the occasional licence of a catalectic line, and with the still more occasional licence of intertwisted rhyme. It is the metre of *Genesis and Exodus*, it is the metre of *The Oak and the Brere*, it is the metre of Chatterton's *Tournament* and of Blake's *Everlasting Gospel*. If the reader will give himself the very slight trouble requisite to imagine certain plastic integers, equivalent in prosodic gravity or quantity, but capable of being compressed into one form and lengthened into another, he will see, without the least further difficulty, how these lines are composed

There remains of course, as there always remains in all poetry from the strictest decasyllabic couplet to the very loosest form—looser even than this seems to be—of “Ingoldsbian” Pindaric anapæstics, the poet’s touch in selecting and grouping these integers Coleridge employs this, on the whole, miraculously, but, as I have been bold enough to say already, not quite unerringly. As in Milton’s case, so here, the apparent impiety cannot, like similar things of Guest’s, be used to invalidate my system, for my system finds no fault with them *as such*. Every line of *Christabel* is justified on the specification given above, every line is duly matriculated. But I do not think every line obtains its degree, at least with honours. The circumstances of the composition and publication would almost sufficiently account for this, Coleridge’s (as it seems to me) imperfect comprehension of what he was doing, as formulated in the Preface, may have something to do with it, but, as in Milton’s case again, the simple, natural, excusable results of experiment have most. For at least the first 150 lines everything turns to right—in fact,

Until you come to the “mastiff bitch”  
There is not even the ghost of a hitch

But there is at least a possible one in

The brands were flat, the brands were dying,  
And in their own white ashes lying,<sup>1</sup>

for it has been observed of old that double rhymes do not well suit this measure. And there is certainly one a little further

Save the boss in the shield of Sir Leoline tall  
Which hung in a smoky old niche of the hall,<sup>1</sup>

where, but for “Which hung,” all the feet would be anapæsts, and where there are rather too many as it is. For it cannot be too often repeated that, in largely equivalenced metres, great care has to be taken lest the

<sup>1</sup> The MS variations—“*Amid*” for “*And in*”, “*of the shield*” for “*in*”, “*murky*” for “*smoky*,” and “*wall*” for “*hall*”—do not affect the metre, though they are, I think, all improvements in the poetry.

*basis* of the metre cease to be apparent—lest you have *metabasis*

This, however, is very rare, and it should be understood as not applying at all to the spell of Geraldine<sup>1</sup> at the end of the first part before the conclusion, which is evidently intended for an inset lyric

One or two instances occur in the second part, and the most prominent of these<sup>2</sup> has been pointed out, but there is no need to dwell on them. The whole piece remains not merely one of the most beautiful in English poetry, but one of the most momentous in English prosody. How, its influence, long before publication, worked upon Scott, and how, through Scott, it passed to Byron, and to everybody, are well-known things. But the extraordinary confusions and delusions which have made the whole subject like one of the magic countries of romance, seem long to have prevented, if they do not still prevent, many if not most people from seeing what had really happened. They jangled about the propriety of poetic narrative at length, in "ballad-measure" or in "Hudibrastics." They talked in many other ways beside the question, but they would not see that the whole point was whether you could construct a good verse to the ear by altering it at pleasure, or rather discretion, from the compressed value of

Beau|tiful | exceed|ingly,

through the staple value of

The love|ly la|dy Chris|tabel,

to the extended value of

'Tis the mid|dle of night | by the cas|tle clock

Coleridge had victoriously shown that you *could*. He had shown it before in *The Ancient Mariner*, but in special

<sup>1</sup> In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell, etc.,  
with the "wasp-waisted" shortening in the centre

But vainly thou warrest

<sup>2</sup> Lines 444-445

For the lady was ruthlessly seized, etc

material and in a form where it was half familiar he showed it now without these limitations or assistances, and *once for all*

He needs no more to place him high among the highest, and he has not much more, though he has something. The prosodic beauty of the "Knight's Tomb" fragment is little, if at all, inferior to that of the three great pieces, and it is one of the earliest instances of the *tragicising* of the anapæst—of the application of that great metre to serious and passionate subjects in English.<sup>1</sup> The best things in "Dejection" are among the best of the quasi-Pindaric kind. The stanza of "Love" suits the poem, and that of "The Dark Lady" even better. "Youth and Age" is not quite prosodically equal to its poetry, and might be pondered by those who hold the Wordsworthian paradox. "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter" is well mated in verse. But "Alice du Clos" is distinctly inferior to those ballads of Southey's which it most resembles, and though there are good prosodic passages in "Lewti," the "Zapolya" song, etc., they are not out of the way. There is also a very singular quality in Coleridge's blanks. They can, as everybody knows, be very fine indeed,<sup>2</sup> but in his earlier period he was too much given to a sham Miltonic swell, as in the famous

Ebullient with creative Deity,

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<sup>1</sup> It has also its own place as an additional example of that equivalent substitution which Coleridge, though he was not, as he thought, "born to introduce" it, yet certainly first "refined and showed its use," in the change from the swallow or swan sweep of

Where | is the grave | of Sir Ar|thur O'Kel|lyn?

Where | may the <sup>[tomb?]</sup><sub>grave</sub> | of that good | man be?—

By the side | of a spring | on the breast | of Helvellyn,  
Un|der the twigs | of a young | birch tree |

to the slackening wheel of

The knight's | bones are dust,  
And his good | sword rust,—  
His soul | is with | the saints, | I trust

<sup>2</sup> Hardly finer perhaps anywhere than in the "Chamouni Hymn"

O struggling with the darkness all the night,  
And visited all night by troops of stars

which has had its *bullae* cracked, or puffed away with laughter, by almost every critic. And when they were not bombastic they were sometimes a little null. But all this is beside the question. In *Kubla Khan* Coleridge adjusted the older prosody absolutely and definitely to the newer poetry, in *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* he gave that poetry not, as he thought, a new form, but one *uralt*, a half-lost ancestral heirloom recovered and adjusted once for all to the needs of the present and the future.

Wordsworth  
his theories  
on poetic  
diction

With regard to the important and in some respects intensely prosodic subject of Wordsworth's theories and practice in poetic diction, I do not propose to say much here, because I have said almost everything that I have to say already, and even more appropriately, elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. Since Coleridge, nearly a hundred years ago (with reserves and wrappings decent, and, in the circumstances, inevitable, but forcibly enough), pointed out that the whole theory is almost certainly a priori wrong, and that the theory and the practice together prove it to be so, the vast majority of competent opinion has been of the same mind. I am of course aware that there have been dissidents, and that they have of late been reinforced by persons of varying, but in some cases of great, worth. I am, however, unable to take these dissidents very seriously. People who always in effect, and sometimes in terms, say that William Wordsworth never denied the difference between prose and poetic style, in the face of his statement that there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition, whether they ride off on "essential" or on "metrical composition," may be allowed to ride to any goal and any goal-keeper they choose. At any rate the thing may be put briefly, and in a form not easily, I think, to be demurred to. If

<sup>1</sup> *History of Criticism*, in 200-218 (Edinburgh and London, 1904). I have nothing much to add to this, nothing at all to alter in it, and if I may say so without churlishness or fatuity, nothing to rebut in the unfavourable comments which I have seen on it. But mere silence would perhaps be itself churlish or fatuous.

the sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion  
 is "the language of humble and rustic life," if  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God, who is our home

exhibits "no essential difference from the language of prose," then Wordsworth's theory is right and his theory and practice agree. "But if not, not," as a dialect which speaks and stands no nonsense has it, with its own chaste and crystal finality

The fact is that most at any rate of Wordsworth's recent apologists appear to me to be under the influence partly of a mistake as to the question, and partly of that nameless but common fallacy—the fallacy of "bribery by something else." Their arguments, as a rule, come to this—that there is a great deal of true and useful matter in Wordsworth's contentions. There is, but the question is not this—it is whether those contentions *as a whole, and as he states them*, are not in the first place partly, if not largely, false, and in the second inconsistent with his practice. Nor can they wriggle out of this by the convenient allegation of "context." Wordsworth says nothing about context. Of course, if you dismiss all inconvenient things that he *does* say as "unguarded," and insist in with "of course he must have meant" things that he does *not* say, you may do much. But I do not think the better kind of British jury would regard it as a defence to the charge of murder that A "unguardedly" drew a razor through the carotid of B, and I am sure that the Court of Chancery in its worst days would hardly have admitted the plea that B "must of course have meant" to leave £20,000 to A.

Again, they are, I believe, almost always secretly looking, whether they know it or not, at the modern exaltation of prose as equal to, or better than, poetry. Of course you can write poetry in the prose language of De Quincey, of Landor, of Ruskin, of Pater. But then this is not what Wordsworth, or anybody in 1800, meant by the "language of prose," nor were De Quincey,

Landor, Ruskin, Pater rustics or persons who used the language of ordinary life<sup>1</sup>

Further, "selection" will not help, for Wordsworth's "selected" prose words are often fatal, and his selected good words are oftener still not prose. No! no! all these officious white-washers of the Wordsworthian theory are merely but as the Pelagians who vainly talk and the Anabaptists who falsely boast. When he obeyed his principles he generally, though not always, wrote bad poetry, and when he wrote good poetry he generally, though not always, betrayed his principles. That is the conclusion of the whole matter, and it is but vain breath that is wasted against it. That he did not mean all that he said may be true, that he "was not such a fool as to mean it" is a statement which may be left to the makers of it as to form. But *ὁ γέγραφε, γέγραφε*, and out of his own true letters no special pleading (such as he would himself have disdained) can twist itself or him.

On "harmony  
of numbers"

And so we may turn from diction to metre. There was not much humour in Wordsworth himself, but I have always thought that there must have been a little in the famous, or should be famous, note to the Preface of 1815: "As sensibility to the harmony of numbers, and the power of producing it, are *invariably* attendants upon the faculties above specified [*viz* Observation, Description, Sensibility, Reflection, Imagination and Fancy, Invention, and Judgment], nothing has been said upon those requisites." The enormous *petitio principii* of "invariably," and the equally enormous coolness with which it is advanced to cover ignoring of the true *elénchus*, may seem hardly, or not possibly serious, except in an utter fool, which Wordsworth certainly was not. But anything may be serious in a man who is serious or nothing, and this "W W" certainly was<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I once had the apology put very naively and agreeably by a guileless writer: "They say he is inconsistent, but they misunderstand him. He has made errors in his prefaces, but these are his wrong views, not inconsistency."

<sup>2</sup> It is hardly necessary to support this with any argument. But one suggestion may be made: the "faculties above specified" are, each and all, necessary to the consummate prose novelist. Therefore, according to

The gods, however, were just, as they usually are, and made him, as in the other case of diction, <sup>His actual prosodic quality</sup> a striking example of the falsity of his own doctrine. Not even his diction itself, or his management of meaning, is more responsible for that amazing and (by all but fanatics) admitted inequality of his work than the uncertainty of his prosodic grip. Like his diction, like his management of meaning, it can be a wonderful and beautiful thing, not merely *Tintern Abbey* and the *Ode*, but dozens of other pieces, and hundreds of other passages, are prosodically competent and adequate even for the great office they have to discharge. But with much—an immense “much”—of the rest it is, unfortunately, quite different. I do not refer to the “silly sooth” of the “Alice Fell” class, because the jog-trot and sing-song there, whether defensible or indefensible, are deliberate. But even in his greatest pieces, just referred to, it must be said that Wordsworth’s prosodic gift is very limited. It is sound craft, but has very seldom any magic about it, and it is at its best in blank verse and the plainer Pindaric things, which, as he uses them, are somewhat nearer to Rhetoric than to Poetic in their prosodic quality.

Outside of these the “sensibility to harmony of numbers” too often seems to have gone to sleep and be snoring, while the “power of producing it” has taken a holiday. Enormous numbers of Wordsworth’s blanks are below Southey’s in distinction and verse quality, and on a level with Crabbe’s worst couplet. Passage after passage of the *Prelude* is either intentional burlesque or sheer prose. Why any human being should avail himself of unharmonious numbers to inform us that

On the roof  
Of an itinerant vehicle I sat,  
or that  
My inner judgment  
Not seldom differed from my taste in books,

---

Wordsworth, he is *invariably* a master of numbers as well. The Muse of Literary History smiles and shakes her head. I should perhaps observe that his attitude to the general question of the nature of metre and its connection with poetry lies outside our scope.



is a question that may well be asked, but cannot well, or perhaps anyhow, be answered

But insignificance and flatness are not the only charges that can be justly brought against Wordsworth's numbers, except when he is in his altitudes. He rose in the "Lucy" group almost, but not quite, to the highest heights of the ballad-four and the romance-six, but these few fine stanzas are balanced (*not* taking in the "silly, sooth" pieces) by hundreds of platitudes, prosodically speaking. For the prosodic platitude is a terribly real and distinct thing. His anapaests are nearly always rickety and tin-kettly<sup>1</sup>—in fact he cannot manage fast movement at all, the "sensibility to harmony and power of producing it" desert him utterly there, though there is no reason to suppose that anything had happened to his Observation and the rest. His trochees are rather better, but he does not seem at home there either—in fact the iamb is almost as much Wordsworth's sole foot as it is Pope's. He had a fair imitative faculty of form within the iambic range, and could catch the Burns metre well enough, as well as the seven-syllabled couplet in the charming "Kitten" piece.

The prosody  
of the *Immo-*  
*talit* ode

His strength and his weakness appear remarkably in that great poem which (I fear it must be said in each case, owing to prepossessions on subject, not expression) Mr Arnold thought declamatory, and Lord Morley "notoriously contrary to fact" and partly "nonsense." I, however *impar congressus* with such a pair, think it one of the greatest poems in English. The prosodic movement of ten out of the eleven stanzas is almost faultless—worthy of the great phrase and diction which Wordsworth has nowhere else equalled, and which (as hardly anything in any other poet does) upsets hopelessly his whole theory of poetic diction. But in stanza iv,<sup>2</sup> after four opening lines of entire adequacy, the demon came upon him

<sup>1</sup> Even "Poor Susan," though it has some lovely lines, hardly escapes as a whole

<sup>2</sup> This stanza is, naturally and fortunately, the least well-known passage of the whole, so perhaps the opening, with the peccant part of it, should be given. The remainder is all right

My head hath its coronal

at once jolts the whole scheme out of rhythm, and for ten lines more it staggers and joggles from bad *Christabel* form to sheer Skeltonic, till it rights itself at last, and slips back into the proper measure

It is clear that the man who could be guilty of this was prosodically uncritical—that it was hit-or-miss with him, yet at the same time the hits, where his Genius—a beneficent Mr. Phœbus—thrusts straight and makes up for his feebler and more fumbling Art, are notable. The peculiar pathetic power of the redundant but slightly single-moulded octosyllable—a metre, where the iambic effect seems actually to *flow into* the trochaic—has seldom been better shown than in the last great thing that he did, the dreadfully named and unequal, but at its best beautiful, “Extempore Effusion” on the Seven Dead Makers, in 1835<sup>1</sup>. And there are splendid examples, without redundancy and sometimes with catalexis, in “Brougham Castle”. The meditative power of the decasyllabic quatrain is brought out excellently in the famous “Peel Castle” lines, though, as is well known, he chose

Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call  
 Ye to each other make, I see  
 The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee,  
 My heart is at your festival,  
 My head hath its coronal,  
 The fulness of your bliss I feel—I feel it all  
 O evil day! if I were sullen,  
 While the Earth herself is adorning  
 This sweet May morning,  
 And the children are pulling  
 On every side,  
 In a thousand valleys far and wide,  
 Fresh flowers, while the sun shines warm,  
 And the babe leaps up on his mother's arm

“Pretty enough, very pretty,” if you look at the picture, not ugly, if you take individual lines, as sound, hopelessly out of tune and time if you look at the general measure of the poem

<sup>1</sup> With its famous phrases

The rapt One of the godlike forehead,  
 The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth,

and

How fast has brother followed brother  
 From sunshine to the sunless land!

to spoil the finest of them. Of the full *prosodic* beauty of the sonnet I do not think he was ever master<sup>1</sup>. But the final blanks of "Yew Trees"<sup>2</sup> can hardly be beaten, or the best of "Tintern Abbey", while the modulation of the crowning stanza of "Duty" could not easily be surpassed by the cunningest artist in form. Yet here, as elsewhere, "it was more strong than him," as one of the most admirable of many admirable French idioms has it: he did it because for once he could not help it, against his principles, almost against his will. Now "it was" never "more strong" than Shakespeare, and seldom than Milton or than Shelley. Their prosodic strength joined with that of the occasion: it did not arise therefrom.

So I think it may be said generally of him that in no great poet does prosody play so small a part. He would not, I think, gainsay it, nor would the Wordsworthians, I suppose: so for once we may all agree in a really wonderful unanimity.

An interlude  
of skirmish

Yet it will scarcely be held petulant or fractious if I turn aside here for a moment to break a lance with no Paynim or felon knight on no irrelevant dependence. I happened some years ago to observe on the famous phrase in the great Ode—

Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal silence,

that this was an example of poetic beauty added to, and independent of, the meaning. For this I was rebuked by

<sup>1</sup> This matter of the sonnet will be generally dealt with later.

<sup>2</sup> Beneath whose sable roof

Of boughs, as if for festal purpose, decked  
With uneyebiting berries—ghostly Shapes  
May meet at noontide, Fear and trembling Hope,  
Silence and Foresight, Death the Skeleton  
And Time the Shadow,—there to celebrate,  
As in a natural temple scattered o'er  
With altars undisturbed of mossy stone,  
United worship, or in mute repose  
To lie, and listen to the mountain flood  
Murmuring from Glaramara's inmost caves.

- a *cathedraticus nobilis ex cathedra nobilissima*—in other words, by Professor Bradley, on no less an occasion than his inaugural appearance in the Oxford Chair of Poetry I “deceived myself,” it seems, the sound-value of the phrase was not very specially beautiful, and what beauty there was is not independent of, or definitely added to, the meaning. Now, as to comparative beauty, I shall say nothing (for the comparison of doxies is always idle), except that in Professor Bradley’s preferred passage, the famous

Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore,

the jingle of *-oris* and *-ore*, like that of *tonnerre* and *étonnant* in Bossuet’s equally famous description of the death of Henrietta Stuart, seems to me a thing tolerable, doubtless, to the Latin nations, but slightly offensive to the more sensitive and elflandish ear of our language. But let that go. Is it true that the *beauty* of the Wordsworthian phrase depends wholly on the meaning? That meaning can be exactly expressed thus: “Our

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{noisy} \\ \text{loud-sounding} \\ \text{clamorous} \end{array} \right\} \text{twelvemonths appear minutes [seconds]}$$

in the existence of the unending soundlessness.” I defy any one to make good the charge that I have left out one jot of the meaning, or added one tittle to it, here. The meaning, the whole meaning, and nothing but the meaning, is there, even the opposition of year and moment is not exaggerated. Nor let any one say that these are clumsy, awkward words, for if he does, whether justly or not, λαβὴν δέδωκε. Clumsiness and awkwardness are things of expression, not of meaning. Now let us examine the phrase itself and see what Wordsworth has added to this meaning.

To begin with, the tricky sprite, who made him frequently, though not constantly, contradict his abominable principles by his admirable practice, has prompted him to adopt distinct poetic diction in “our noisy years.” A “year” is not, in strict *meaning*, “noisy,” any more

than it is pleasant or painful or fertile or anything else. It is, in strict meaning, a period of time during which noise or pleasure or pain may be experienced. But "our noisy years," while a distinctly figurative expression (figures always add to the meaning), is also a still more distinctly beautiful one in mere sound. The two diphthongs in it not only enrich that sound, but present a curious contrast-coincidence in the way in which the *o* and *e* sounds are modified by the *z* and *a*. Translate either word, with the most rigorous observation of meaning, and you must lose this. Again, "moment" and "being" have also a singular relationship in their trochaic character non-trochaically adjusted, and in the contrast once more of *o* and *e*, now unblended. Lastly, "eternal" and "silence" keep up the game by the foil of the dull, prolonged thunder of "eternal" to the sharp, deep, brief clang of "silence".

But, much more, this sound-material so far might make prose, but it would not necessarily, except so far as noticed in reference to "moment" and "being," make verse. Wordsworth has next done something else which rustics and ordinary folk do not very often do. He has thrown the words and their necessary expletives into a great blank-verse phrase (that the piece actually rhymes matters no more than, as we saw, it did in *Lyidas* or in *Romeo and Juliet*), into one of those great blank-verse phrases of which Shakespeare found out the secret, and which *can* have nothing to do with meaning<sup>1</sup>. The whole is practically one, but the parts have each its character. The first line has, from different points of view, three or four pauses (for there is a thinkable one at "in"), and none at all—that is to say, it runs from beginning to end, but runs slowly. And it runs with a cadence different entirely from that which, after the line-pause, appears in

Of the eternal silence,

itself one of those great line-fragments which have the

<sup>1</sup> Unless, of course, the term is so extended as itself to lose all meaning, or to include unspecified, unlimited, and uncovenanted Hinterlands of "suggestion."

quality of a complete line, and which could be so used in drama

I hope I need not disclaim insensibility to the contrast, as pure meaning, of time and eternity, of silence and noise. It is great, but it is the handling that does it here—the handling “in a poetical way.” The Psalmist or Isaiah, Æschylus or Lucretius, Donne or Browne, might have put this meaning magnificently for me in verse or prose, in Hebrew or Greek, in Latin or English, but there would in each case have been something added to the meaning, something in a very true sense independent of it, which each would have given me, and which I should have kept distinct, and distinctly treasured, as I do this of Wordsworth’s giving. The damsel Self-deceit, with the pipe-clay so conveniently concealed in her pocket, is a dangerous if an agreeable companion, no doubt, but on this occasion I do not think it is in my company that she will be found.

The prosody of Scott has many points of peculiar Scott interest, not the least of which, for us, is the contrast, in a very important point, between him and the poet whom we shall take next—the poet who was in their own time considered, with whatever justice, to represent West Britain, as Scott himself represented North. It is well known that Scott had less of musical music in him than any recorded poet, except perhaps Shelley—that he not only had no technical instruction or practical skill in it, but, as the phrase goes, did not know one note from another, and hardly knew one tune from another. Yet in prosodic music there have been few apter scholars, and not many greater masters when variety and excellence are taken into joint consideration.

His largest historic feat in prosody is, of course, the catching up and popularising of the Christabel metre long before *Christabel* herself appeared. The attempts which have been made—by the sort of person who would naturally make them—to bring this under the head of “plagiarism” are really as foolish as they are un-

generous. Scott never made the least secret of his obligations, and Coleridge, at any rate in public (he seems to have not quite equally succeeded in "choking down the old man" in private), acknowledged Scott's dealing with the matter as a gentleman and a scholar should. But it has, I think, never been sufficiently remarked that a chance recitation or reading of *Christabel* at Christchurch can hardly have done more than precipitate and crystallise things long previously existing in solution in "the Wizard's" mind.

His relation  
to *Christabel*

*Christabel* is not in ballad metre, but the lines of *Christabel* are scattered broadcast and wholesale about the ballads, which Scott knew as probably no other poet has ever known them. Spenser and Chatterton had preceded Coleridge, and Scott knew Spenser and Chatterton almost as well as he knew the ballads. Further, irregular though unrhymed narrative verse had, nearly a decade before the *Lay*, been exemplified in *Thalaba*, which Scott justly admired, and in the early romances which, again, he knew as no one else, not even his friend Ellis, then knew them, he could find equivalenced octosyllables, romance-sixes (single, double, or even longer), and "broken and cuttit" rhymed stanzas of various kinds to his heart's content. I do not say that he would have used the metre which he did use if that lucky visit to the Hampshire coast had never taken place, but I think it by no means improbable that he would.

At any rate, the poems from the *Lay* to the *Lord*, through the *Lady* and the rest, are by no means mere pastiches of *Christabel*, but immense developments and variations upon it, metrically speaking.<sup>1</sup> They were all written and printed before *Christabel* was published: it can only have been parts that Scott heard, and the variations which Coleridge tried, even in the whole, as far as it exists, are not very numerous. The tamer and more machine-made regular octosyllables which open and

<sup>1</sup> Especially in the increasing of the dose of eights to sixes, when he adopts this combination—a device which was to lead to Tennyson's "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" and Mr Swinburne's *Tale of Balin*.

close the cantos of the *Lay* (and which, of course, Jeffrey admired) break, with the narrative itself, into schematic variations, of which Coleridge at best merely suggested the possibility. There are many more anapæsts, and the very abundance of them prevents the effect of "changed base," which, as we have pointed out, sometimes suggests itself with a jar in *Christabel*, where solid iambs pass into nearly solid anapæsts. The definite arrangement in stanzas, or blocks, enables the poet to make each as it were a symphonic integer, and to vary his scheme to suit it, while their comparative shortness gives him something of the descriptive advantage of the Spenserian stanza. I need hardly insult the reader by warning him that I have no intention of exalting Scott at Coleridge's expense, but distributive justice is not content with distributing to one person only.

Scott's verse-romances are fortunately so well known, and their *faire* is so little recondite in appearance, that there is no need to dwell very long on them. But it is desirable to repeat a note of warning which has to be sounded whenever Scott is mentioned. He did "write with ease," but to think that, because he did so, he wrote without art, is to find yourself between the parapets of the Pons Asinorum, if not plunging down the hell within the gates of the Paradise of Fools. If the man who could make this apparently loose and lounging measure suit such things (to go onwards from the *Lay*) as the martyrdom of Constance and nearly the whole of *Flodden*, as the picture of the Tees and the final vengeance of Bertram in *Rokeby*, as a dozen descriptive passages in *The Lady of the Lake* and the *Lord of the Isles*, was not an artist—why, then, the Devil has at least one person's leave to fly away with this poor fine art, as Mr Carlyle wished him to do with all of them. The chief charge that can be brought against the later poems is that Scott allowed himself to slip too much into the unbroken octosyllable, on which, as we have seen from the beginning, the danger of a slipshod and monotonous fluency wars and watches with ceaseless malignity. But



even as late as the "Valley of St John" passage in that generally undervalued *Bridal of Triermain* (which pays a rather graceful royalty of names to *Christabel* itself), the power of the measure appears. Also there is another thing to say, as Thackeray said of that Rubens to whom he was not too just "This is art, if you will, but a very naive kind of art, and now you know the trick, don't you see how easy it is? *now that you know the trick, suppose you take a canvas and see whether you can do it?*" Many have tried to do it in Scott's way, and how have they succeeded? So ill that there is just *one* user of the octosyllable for long narrative since who has succeeded, and he dropped the *Christabel* form altogether.

His other  
narrative  
metres

The fact is that Scott was almost a consummate master of prosody—wherever he failed, it was not there.<sup>1</sup> Turn to the much-abused *Harold the Damned*, on which vials of critical wrath and contempt have been poured ever since a *Critical Reviewer* gravely discovered that the "preparations and adornments are not consistent with the state of society two hundred years before the Danish invasion." Put the "Lotos-Eaters," *Adonais*, and the *Eve of St Agnes* aside, and it will not be easy to find, in the nineteenth century, better Spenserians than the stanzas describing the murder-chambers of the Castle of the Seven Shields. It will certainly be hard to match them in *Childe Harold*, though the measure of that poem will be found frequently, if not always, in the *Vision of Don Roderick*, which is one of the least good things that Scott did. He seldom tried heroic couplets, nor was he a great hand at them, they were too much "things devised by the enemy" to be his business. But his blank verse is a very curious study. The almost unrelieved

<sup>1</sup> And when he did fail, which was seldom, it was merely because, at the moment, he did not take trouble enough. With his usual impeccable fairness, which makes any suggestion that he "stole" from Coleridge as fatuous as it is offensive, he acknowledged that Mat Lewis was his schoolmaster in this respect, and Mat, as we shall see when we come to him, was not ill qualified. Nor is it the only case in which a schoolmaster has had scholars far greater than himself.

badness of his plays—the only really bad things that he ever did—has infected the verse, but the badness is certainly not in the verse itself, as the admirable fragments which he used to throw off for mottoes sufficiently show. It is true that some of the “Old Play” scraps are reminiscences more or less exact, but many others are not, and they include some of the best blank verse—outside the absolutely consummate specimens of the great age—to be found in English.

It was, however, in lyric that Scott showed his prosodic power most, and furnished us with the most interesting contrast to his successor. The extraordinary excellence of his anapaests (which he may have learnt from Lewis, but in which he left his teacher simply out of sight) is uncontested. The three pieces mentioned<sup>1</sup> in the last volume, “Young Lochinvar,” “Bonnie Dundee,” and the “Cavalier’s Song” in *Rokeby*, attain the true, not the false, gallop of the metre as few other things do, and in “Lochinvar” more particularly the modulation of the prosodic music is quite miraculous. Any suitable tune must suit it, but it wants none at all: it brings its own with it, and he would be a clever composer who should equal or represent that of

One touch—to her hand—and one word—in her ear,

with the sharp and checking divide at each foot, and the spondee, or something very like it, before the succeeding triples. Contrast it with the continuous rush of

“They’ll have fleet steeds that follow,” quoth young Lochinvar,  
or

There was racing and chasing on Cannobie Lee,  
and you will get almost the utmost possibilities of the measure in the particular directions

But Scott never comes short, whatever measure he tries, and in his ballad fragments he is unsurpassable.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II p. 431. There is considerable prosodic interest in “The Eve of St. John”, we may recur to it under Moore and Macaulay, only indicating the redundant—or rather really extra-metrical—syllable in such lines as

And I’ll chain the bloodhound and the war[der] shall not sound

✓The two peaks of attainment here are, I suppose, the stanza in the girl's ballad at Ellangowan,<sup>1</sup> where the substitution is like the advance and retreat of a great violinist's bow, and the admittedly unapproachable eeriness of "Proud Maisie." This last marvel is of the family of "Phyllida flouts me," and has all the Protean possibilities of its kin—with special adjustment towards solemnity. The man who could get that music out of words—it wants no other but a sort of recitative—could do anything. And he strews it about, as well as other things beyond price, with his usual godlike indifference to cost, or fuss, or consequence. When I read Scott—prosodically as otherwise—I always think of the saying of a not quite idiotic person that if potato flowers were as rare and dear as orchids people would go mad over them!

His critics

When therefore we are told that Scott "shows a poor choice of metres," and manages those which he does choose badly—that this is probably due to his admitted insensibility to music (shared with Shelley, remember!), and that his lines "obey strict rules as far as the number of syllables is concerned, but do not fill the measure," I fear we must, whatever our respect for the critic,<sup>2</sup> object very decidedly and unswervingly. The statement about the "number of syllables" is notoriously contrary to fact—you cannot open a page of the *Lay* without perceiving it. Indeed his supposed syllabic irregularity was one of the main causes of the outcry of Jeffrey and his kind. For the rest, it is possible to maintain—and it is not here our business to deny—that Scott has rarely the full poetical quality of the intenser poets. That his metrical quality is "poor" simply cannot be asserted, except on some very curious calculus. Indeed the remarks which accompanied the utterance referred to showed that the speaker was under the domination of a musical heresy of

<sup>1</sup> "Are these the Links of Forth," she said,  
 "Or are they the Crooks of Dee,  
 Or the bonnie woods of Warroch Head,  
 That I so fain would see?"

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Stirling Maxwell at the Scott dinner in Edinburgh, 27th November 1908

confusion<sup>1</sup> He had, it would seem, too much non-poetical music in his head, as Scott had too little And so his remarks, like all remarks of the kind, are profitable for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, not indeed directly, but indirectly, because they show us what to avoid and how it was not avoided Nay, the mention of "bars" in the context settles the matter "Bewar the *Bar*" should be the motto of the prosodists, no matter what distinguished family may claim it

The position which Moore occupies in prosodic history is almost unique, and for us extremely interesting and important In so far as he ranges in line with poets in general (and it may be observed in passing that the attempt to belittle him as a poet is a curious piece of "Philistinism reversed") he need not occupy us very much He is thoroughly up to all metres that he uses, from blank verse and couplet through narrative stanza to lyric, and, as almost everybody knows, his command of triple time—a phrase used with malice here—is exceptionally deft and complete, whether in the more sentimental use of it, or in those admirable satiric measures of his which give the heartiest artistic satisfaction to readers quite on the other side of political thinking Poets of Irish blood or birth have almost always been good metrists, and Moore is no exception to the rule But by his time it was more of a peculiarity for a poet not to be at least a tolerable metrist than to be one, and except in his lighter verse there is no such distinction about Moore in pure prosody that we need dwell much on him

Special relation of Moore's prosody to music

But there is something more to be said Of all modern English poets he has written the most and the best songs directly to and for music, and of all English poets he was—unless I mistake—the most thoroughly practical musician There is a fine but distinct difference between him and, for instance, Burns in this respect I suppose Burns sang, as most Scotsmen did and some still do, but I do not

<sup>1</sup> Sir John thought it "generally agreed that the basis of British metric is the bar, exactly as in music" I venture to interject "Nie pozwalam!" for my part, and I do not think I shall find myself in a minority of one

remember any evidence that he composed or studied music, or even understood it technically. He had a marvellous faculty of suiting his words to well-known popular airs, and that was all, though it was enough, and more than enough. In fact, as is also well known and has been noted, in a large number of perhaps his best songs he started from the old words or parts of them.

But Moore for the most part wrote words to airs which had no words, or none in English, or quite different ones, he often seems to have modified the existing musical schemes, and he not seldom composed or recomposed his music. In fact he, and almost he alone, seems to have been what the musical prosodists would have all poets to be—a person who was “bilingual”—who could express himself indifferently in notes and in words, or in the two blended.

The results of this were double, and though he himself recognised the fact clearly and has stated frankly one side of them, this fact has been very little studied, and its main lesson hardly learnt at all. Only the good side presents itself in some of his most famous and, I dare say, beautiful things, “When in death,” “I saw from the beach,” “Oft in the stilly Night,” where the prosodic and the musical music are each perfect in its way, and each perfectly accommodated to the way of the other. But there is a second class<sup>1</sup> where this cannot be said—where the prosodic music, though no doubt accommodated to the musical, is accommodated in its own despite to its own loss, and in fact occasionally to its temporary destruction. Not that Moore ever, or save very rarely, condescends to the vulgar error of “committing short and long,” of laying a musical stress on a syllable that will not prosodically bear it, or straining the already large tolerance of English “common-ness” by slurring a syllable unflinchingly long. But he does do something else which

<sup>1</sup> It may almost be said that there is a *third*—where the music necessitates prosodic arrangements, unobjectionable in themselves, but not strictly according to prosodic rule. Of such is that “Shining on | shining on,” to which I referred in vol. 1 p. 403 *note*, thereby drawing down the (I think mistaken) disapproval of a friendly American critic.

is prosodically wicked, or, rather, prosodically impossible, and what that is we must point out

Take, for instance, the favourite, or once favoured, "Eveleen's Bower" That melodious and (as Moorish morality goes) most moral ditty is apparently couched in a very simple metre, anapæstic sizains with 1, 2, 4, and 5 monometric, and 3 and 6 dimetric But in reading it prosodically one becomes conscious of some awkward jolts arising from syllables which are *nally* extra-metrical, and therefore, according to the views of this book, *utlagatae*, though one may sometimes wink at them as at other outlaws Such is the last line of the first stanza

The lesson  
of "Eveleen's  
Bower"

And wept behind the clouds o'er the maiden's shame

Here the prosodic stanza has no use for that "the"—cannot away with it—cannot smuggle it by any hideous compound of amphibrachs or amphimacers The third of the second—

And Heaven smiled again with her vestal flame,

may, though grudgingly, be allowed the benefit of that monosyllabic pronunciation of "Heav'n" which Gascoigne blessed and Mitford banned, but it is prosodically ugly And the whole of the rest of this stanza<sup>1</sup> is the same, for in 4 you must either make "will" long, which is out of place, or allow a four-syllable foot, you must grant the tetrasyllable, anyhow, in 5 "Many a" can be *escamoted* in stanza three,<sup>2</sup> but the stumble of the extra syllable returns in the finale<sup>3</sup>

Now, I know that there are people who will accuse me of prosodic prudery for objecting to these extra syllables I can only say that I think I have shown that English

<sup>1</sup> But none will see the day,  
When the clouds shall pass away,  
Which that dark hour left upon Eveleen's fame

<sup>2</sup> And many a deep print

<sup>3</sup> But there's a light above  
Which alone can remove

That stain upon the snow of fair Eveleen's fame

Of course you can get out of the difficulty by splitting the lines and couplets violently, making some parts wholly dissyllabic in basis (as "But none | will see | the day") and others mixed But this is uglier still (Compare the line quoted from "The Eve of St John" above, and note the difference)

poetry could do without them, and had done without them from Chaucer to Coleridge. I do not see why what was good enough for them should not be good enough for Tommy Moore, though I have, as I have said, not the least contempt for the said Thomas, but a good deal for those who condemn him, and though I am by no means excommunicating tetrasyllabic feet as such and *in saccula*.

But the thing recovers toleration, and much more than toleration, in virtue of the lesson it gives us, that though there undoubtedly is, and should be, a concordat between music and prosody, the terms of that concordat must rigidly exclude dictation by the former to the latter, and still more rigidly attempts to arrange the latter in terms of the former. They have large subjects over which they can jointly rule, large fields which they can jointly cultivate with pleasure and profit to everybody concerned. But each has its proper districts in which the other can only intrude, or even permit itself to be invited, to its own loss, and not improbably to the loss of both. The astounding tricks which the musical prosodists play with blank verse, and the frank admission of some of them that blank verse is not, to their thinking, poetry at all, and the practical impossibility of "setting" it without entirely denaturalising it, illustrate this fact on the one side. "Eveleen's Bower" and the "Portuguese" air words<sup>1</sup> illustrate it on the other.

Nor would Thomas—*sive* "Moore" *navult*, *sive* "Little" *sive* "Brown Junior"—have had the very slightest difficulty in setting this prosodic crookedness straight had he chosen to do so. But he did not choose. And, as any one may see who will hum either the actual

<sup>1</sup> I do not mean "Flow on, thou shining River," which is perfectly regular, but "Should those | fond hopes | e'er for|sake thee," to which Moore, with his usual good natured frankness, has appended the note "This is one of the many instances among my lyrical poems, though the above, it must be owned, is an extreme case, where the metric has been necessarily sacrificed to the structure of the air." As a matter of fact the base of the lines varies irregularly—witness the opening line given above, the next—

Which now | so sweet|ly thy heart | employ,

and the last—

On our thresh|old a wel|come still found

air or any one that he makes up for himself to the words, they come musically all right. But this does not make them right prosodically.<sup>1</sup> What it does do is to indicate and illustrate, with inestimable power of search-light, the gap that here lies between the two. It does more: it explains to us at once how the Steeles and people of that sort, going on musical principles, make prosodic "pie" of poetry that is all right in itself. No musical light above can remove the prosodic stigma on Eveleen, but one can only be thankful that this light above has so helpfully revealed to us what it has.<sup>2</sup>

The prosody of Landor ought to occupy a more considerable place in studies of him than has generally been given to it, but it does not require very much space in a history of the special subject. Some light is cast upon it—and like a grateful thing it returns the benefit to the giver—by his well-known statement that poetry was an amusement to him, but that his real efforts were bestowed upon prose, and in studying it one understands still better that extraordinary and at first sight puzzling absence of difference between his prose and his verse. The great Landorian phrase is indeed common to both, but it is rather more copiously bestowed upon prose. While, as if with intent to make amends, though in a doubtful fashion, he seems sometimes to have aimed, in verse itself, at that almost negative perfection—that comparative featurelessness—which is no doubt a charm in certain prose, though not specially in his. The narrative blank verse of *Gebir* and other things, the dramatic blank verse of the "Acts and Scenes" and the verse-dialogues, his usual decasyllabic couplets, and his octosyllables like "Damocles and Ida," are almost faultless; but if their faultlessness is saved from being uninteresting, it is chiefly by imagery and phrase. Although he does

Landor his  
ordinary  
prosody

<sup>1</sup> That is to say, they are "words," not poetry, song-thralls, not the freemen of the Muse.

<sup>2</sup> I would not be thought to denounce such things as the beautiful

At the mid-hour of night when stars are weeping I fly

The rhythm, though unusually managed, comes all right here as a five-foot anapaest, and does not require any "shake" or "twiddle."



himself some injustice by asserting, in one of his later writings, that he had been turned from the study of the eighteenth-century poets by Milton, and had afterwards been able to listen to nobody else, there is no doubt too much Miltonic echo in these larger pieces. Yet Milton never fails to make his form eloquent. Apologists may talk of "impersonality," "classical restraint," and anything else. The fact remains that the bulk of Landor's longer poems too much resembles in form—and it is in that respect alone that we are speaking of them—a very perfect school exercise, a collection of glorified Newdigates.

That of his  
"epigrams"

It is not so with his shorter pieces. Even the blank verse introductory lines to the *Collection* of 1846 contain verse with more idiosyncrasy in it than the "pale and noble" staple of their larger forerunners, and the motelike myriads of epigrams, in the wide sense, that follow, derive sometimes the greater part, and almost always something, of their admitted charm from the fingering of the measure. Certainly this is the case with the two peaks of his poetry, "*Rose Aylmer*" and "*Dirce*," where, as it were with a right and left shot, he has revived some of the best cadence of the Caroline "common" and "long" measure. In fact Landor has a most singular resemblance to Ben Jonson<sup>1</sup> in the fashion in which each has assimilated the nature of the ancient epigram—its singular pellucidity, and the closeness and cleanness of form which accompanies pellucidity naturally enough. Only in the Greek Anthology and in these two English writers, perhaps, can be found things so perfectly resembling the dewdrop, the sunlit icicle, the tide-washed cornelian, and the jewels which art has more or less successfully modelled on these three natural examples of the combined qualities, with colour added or withheld. The devices adopted are of course not new, they could not well be, and Landor would have been suspicious of

<sup>1</sup> There is even a more special resemblance between "*Rose Aylmer*" and "*Drink to me only*," in that the former, as has recently been pointed out, is almost a mosaic, not merely of thought, but of solid phrase taken from this and that poet, even such an unlikely one as Beattie. Here also the "added charm," of special poetic handling in composition, is the source of the beauty.

them if they had borne a novel appearance But they are magisterially applied, as, for instance, this sudden shortening of outline, which must have displeased his good contemporary Crowe<sup>1</sup>

Pleasure<sup>1</sup> why thus desert the heart  
 In its spring tide?<sup>2</sup>  
 I could have seen her—I could part,  
 And but have sighed  
 O'er every youthful charm to stray—  
 To gaze, to touch  
 Pleasure<sup>1</sup> why take so much away,  
 Or give so much?

A trifle, perhaps, but it will not be easy to beat this trifle in appropriateness and beauty of prosodic form

One is tempted to linger among these far too little known gems, such as the thoroughly Elizabethan—

I hope, indeed, ere long,<sup>2</sup>

and many another of the "Ianthé" poems I think he made a mistake when in "St Charles Borromeo"<sup>3</sup> he cut the quatrain in a fashion different from Tennyson's cutting, putting a four-syllable line in the second place and a six in the fourth The other way would have been all right And I may venture, not for the first time, to point to the verse in *Dry Sticks*, apparently written not much before the date (1858) of that volume, as an example of "faultless" handling that is *not* devoid of idiosyncrasy

'Tis pleasant to behold  
 The little leaves unfold  
 Day after day, still pouting at the Sun,  
 Until at last they dare  
 Lay their pure bosoms bare—  
 Of all these flowers I know the sweetest one

If the last line is not quite equal to the rest, it is not for prosodic reasons, and the whole is almost a text for

<sup>1</sup> *Vide inf.* chapter on Prosodists in this book

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, ed 1876, vol viii p 2, No xxviii

<sup>3</sup> Saint, beyond all in glory who surround  
 The throne above!

Thy placid brow no thorn blood dropping crowned,  
 No grief came o'er thy love — *Ibid* p 213

pointing out what, without splash or curvet, zigzag or explosion, perfect and distinct prosodic adjustment can do for little more than ordinary things. While for handling of the famous "sevens" of the seventeenth century "The Three Roses"<sup>1</sup> is not easy to beat

Rogers

The only other poet in the proper sense, of the special half-generation, whose verse demands notice here, is Campbell, for Rogers (who was older than any of the persons mentioned as yet in this chapter) deserves, partly owing to that age, no special criticism in it. The once famous *Pleasures of Memory* are inferior Goldsmith, *Italy* and the rest are of that mediocre blank verse which is not so much "crippled" as "watered" prose, and the octosyllabics which he wrote after the popularity of Scott and Byron, are not very different from the least good examples of Scott. The criticism which has been cited above as inapplicable to Scott as a whole applies to Rogers as a whole: his verses obey the rule of regularity in number of syllables, and have little else to recommend them. The century in which he had been born had taught him this regularity, the century in which he spent the longer portion of his long life taught him nothing more.

Campbell

Rogers was thus a Janus of the worse face only. Campbell kept both. His couplet-poems, from the respectable *Pleasures of Hope* to the illegible *Theodric* and the unread *Pilgrim of Glencoe*, may be classed, from one point of view, with those of Rogers. The Spenserians of *Gertrude of Wyoming* are among the least successful effects in that great metre made by any poet who has elsewhere done really good things. But his lyrics are in quite a different case. When the deadening hand of the long poem—for Campbell seems to have been not merely a slow, but a positively lazy writer—and the obsession of regular metres was off him, he became another man. The rough vigour of the version of "Hybrias the Cretan" contrasts strongly, but most satisfactorily on either side,

<sup>1</sup> When the buds began to burst, etc

*Ibid* p 288

with the languor, almost as of an eighteenth-century Tennyson (if anybody can frame that idea<sup>1</sup>), of the "Fragment from Alcman" The anapaests of "Lochiel" furnish forth some splendid and famous lines, but they have not always shaken off the rocking-horse movement, which is less, though sometimes, present, in the beautiful but much less well-known lines "Written on Visiting a Scene in Argyllshire," and, after the first splendid stanza, infests the "Soldier's Dream," while it has "The Wounded Hussar" for an almost unrescued prey Many of the minor poems are not uninteresting prosodically, but, after all, Campbell's three most famous things are, as is not always the case, his best prosodic tests

"Hohenlinden" comes out triumphantly In fact the prosody is more than half this battle—the close-knit triplets with the similar but separated refrain-fourth line, the imperfect rhymes on almost though not quite assonanced word-values,<sup>2</sup> are prosodic or nothing "The Battle of the Baltic" is more ambitious, and at its best even finer, but its structure is more artificial, and the artifice does not always "come off" The tapering of the anapaestic scheme to the single foot line at the end is very bold indeed, and perhaps issues a perilous invitation to burlesque,<sup>3</sup> but it is not easy to conceive anything better suited to the subject While "Ye Mariners of England" shows that Campbell had more than something of the special skill of his countryman, Burns, at catching up and perfecting old song-snatches<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is one of the recompenses of the study of prosody that it brings many such forms before the half shut eye

<sup>2</sup> "Rapidly," "scenery," "revelry," "artillery," "rapidly" again, "canopy," "sepulchre," in which Campbell was certainly thinking of Dryden's rhyme, and reading "sepulchre" These cretic endings are the very prosodic soul of the piece

<sup>3</sup> We shall see that Holmes acknowledged suggestion from it for his best comic pathetic piece

<sup>4</sup> The pressure of space becomes uncomfortable here There are many isolated pieces of verse which can hardly be noticed in detail, such as the extraordinarily pathetic cadence of Lamb's "The Old Familiar Faces" and the astonishing *réussite* of Wolfe's "Burial of Sir John Moore" Fortunately most of these are well known, and few are recondite in system In both the cases mentioned the redundant syllable, with its curious retroactive effect, is the secret

Mat Lewis

"Only one other poet," I said above, and it was in the strict sense true, but there is yet another writer of verses who in this history cannot be wholly neglected, and that is Matthew Gregory Lewis. Perhaps nothing that he wrote deserves the name of poetry. But we have indubitable testimony to the fact that, both by precept and example, he was, at an early date and long before the great work of the great school appeared, the champion, both of exact versification in a good sense, and of widened and strengthened versification as well. You may laugh as much as you like at "Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene," but it is quite certain that the pair showed the way to something like a new use of the anapaest, that Lewis was a perfect master of easy metre years before Moore and decades before Paez and Barham, and that, in his time and place, he was really important prosodically. He got his knack beyond all doubt, from his early German visits and studies—from Bürger more particularly perhaps, but by no means from Bürger only.<sup>1</sup> For there is no doubt that if Germany was doing us some harm by hexameters, and rhymelessness, and other follies, she had in her lyric, old and new, considerable stores of refreshment and restoration for English at this time.

<sup>1</sup> The author of "Lanore" (as, for instance, in "Lenardo und Blandine") does not quite escape the tendency of the anapaest to cantering rather than galloping motion, but his inspiring influence must have been great. In fact, as is indeed natural, German poetry, carefully studied, is a very great help to understanding English, though care is certainly needed. I do not think that I have had any external help from modern literatures more important than that which I have drawn from being familiar since very early years with German poetry from Goethe to Heine, and from having more recently extended my knowledge both backwards and forwards.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SECOND ROMANIC GROUP (LEIGH HUNT, BYRON, SHELLEY, KEATS, AND MINORS)

Leigh Hunt—Byron his lyrics—His blank verse, etc.—His Spenserians—His serio-comic *ottava*—Digression on Freie—Byron's adoption of it—*Don Juan*—Shelley—Undeliberateness of his prosody—The "Juvenilia"—*Queen Mab*—His blank verse from *Alastor* onwards—His early Spenserians—*Prime Athanas* and the tercet—*Rowland and Helen*—Shelley's octosyllables—*Julian and Maddalo*—his heroics—Blank verse and other metres in drama—*Prometheus Unbound*—*The Masque of Anarchy*, etc.—*The Witch of Atlas* and the octave—*Epipsychion* and *Adonais*—*The Triumph of Life*, etc.—The smaller lyrics, etc.—Keats—The early Poems—The Sonnets—*Endymion* and Keats's first couplet—The prosodic criticism in the *Quarterly*—*Isabella* and his octave—*Lamia* and the improved couplet—*Hyperion* and its blank verse—*The Eve of St Agnes* and the Spenserian—The various ode stanzas—*La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *The Eve of St Mark*—The "Intermediates"—"L E L"—Haynes Bayly—Macaulay—"The Last Buccaneer"—Præd—"The Præd metre"—Hood—"The Haunted House"—His minor poems—Darley and Beddoes

It is not merely convenient, but almost necessary, to make two batches of the throng of poets who illustrate the years from 1798 to 1824. For not only would their aggregation make a chapter enormous, in the strictest sense of that rather misused word, but there is a distinct cleavage between them—a cleavage, though produced by rather different causes, of something the same sort as that which exists between the strictly Elizabethan and the mainly post-Elizabethan dramatists.

The writer whom some may be surprised to find put Leigh Hunt in front of Byron, Shelley, and Keats in the title-heading,

deserves his place for something more than the fact that he was four years older than Byron—for something more even than the still greater claim of having been, to no small extent, the direct master of Keats himself. Hunt is one of those very distinctly second-, if not third-rate poets, who deserve almost the first place in a history of prosody. He has had some rather extravagant personal and political championship, but his personal and political partisans have too often done him nothing like the justice that he deserves in matters of pure literature. A great poet he was not, nor was he exactly a great writer in any way. But in prose he, more than any one else, deserves the credit of having turned the eighteenth-century essay into that of the nineteenth, and in verse, especially the form of verse, he deserves even wider if not higher praise. That singular catholicity—to be a little kind, and more than a little blind to the fact that it almost deserves the less amiable word promiscuity—of taste which marks Hunt, and which Macaulay, as shrewdly as kindly, selected for eulogy, did not in him confine itself to mere appreciation. It found frequent expression in intelligent following. His greatest achievement in this way was of course, so far as we are concerned, the revival of the enjambed decasyllabic couplet which he effected and partly taught to Keats. This will be best dealt with when we come to Keats himself. But the results of Hunt's own affectionate discipleship to all English poets from Chaucer downwards, and to many of the French and Italians, were not limited to this. The consequence is that in his by no means extensive budget of verse (it is perhaps rather to his credit that he wrote so little, considering that he wrote so long and lived at least partly by writing) there could be found a large number of things prosodically remarkable. *Rimini* of course is one, and, from the above-mentioned point of view, the chief. But the famous "Abou Ben Adhem," which judiciously adopts the less enjambed form of couplet, could hardly have been better clothed than in the quiet, evenly flowing robes of that measure, where it

is neither snipsnap nor slipshod. Both the anapæsts and the iambes of "The Palfrey" are as deftly managed, and so are the fourteeners of "The Glove and the Lions," waiving altogether the question whether Hunt or Browning has taken the right view of the story. Neither shall any difference about views prevent acknowledgment of the metrical excellence of "Captain Sword and Captain Pen" The well-known rondeau "Jenny kissed me" (they say now it was *not* Mrs Carlyle, which is a pity) could not be better of its kind, and the "Nile" and "Fish" sonnets (at least the last of the three on this latter subject) are almost consummate. When a man, in a tournament with Shelley and Keats, can strike such a stroke as

The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands,  
he has hewn his way once for all into the Joyous Gard of Prosody. That line was written ninety years ago, and you will find echoes of it often since. But you will not find anything like it for ninety years before, and hardly for twice ninety, till you come to Shakespeare—since it is not quite Miltonic. Still, it may be said, all these are small things, and you can match most, if not all of them, elsewhere. But will you match all of them in the same man at the same time, and earlier than this?—that is the question. Leigh Hunt is beginning the nineteenth century *karole* of eclectic and varied versifying—the multiplication of metre to match the multiplication of subject, and he is exhibiting that curious rummaging and ransacking of earlier poetry, domestic and foreign, which was also to have so great an influence on his younger contemporaries, and which in his elder had, save in Southey's case,<sup>1</sup> been a little partial and one-sided.

We shall see, when we come to discuss Guest's *History of English Rhythms*, that he falls foul of Byron for laxity of metre, and I shall find myself there in the rather unwonted position of defender of "the noble poet" in the particular instance. Nor am I disposed to think that

<sup>1</sup> It may be urged that Wordsworth, especially about 1807, studied the earlier poets, even with special prosodic intent. He did, but it was rather late in his career, and I do not think it profited him much.



the hardest things which can be said of Byron usually, or perhaps ever, concern the domain of prosody. His inability to reach the most sacred and highest places of poetry indeed pursues him here—there is absolutely nothing of the magician about him, and he is sometimes inclined to what, in his unfortunate way, he was disposed to look upon as a proper aristocratic carelessness—a carelessness not, like Scott's, a natural and actual part of an unpretentious nature, but, on the contrary, part of his own invariable and deliberate pose. His rhymes are too often botched up for the minute, as in the famous case of "There let him lay," and his phrase varies from the bombastic to the slipshod. But he can always use metre with a craftsman-like effectiveness when he chooses, and sometimes he is not unoriginal in respect of it. I have not yet succeeded in discovering<sup>1</sup> where he got the metre of

✓ I enter thy garden of roses,  
" Beloved and fair Hudee,

which, as my friend, Mr Mowbray Morris, pointed out to me many years ago, is the original of Præd's "Letter of Advice," and of Mr Swinburne's "Dolores," slightly further altered, and which, by one of the miracles of prosody, turns the rickety jingle of Byrom's and Shenstone's and Cowper's three-foot anapaest, and his own "Bright be the place of thy soul," into a magnificent harmony. I do not see how any one can think scorn of the movement of

When we two parted,

where the "knapping" of the anapaestic dimeter is magisterially accomplished, and in the same way I am not going to let any "hackneyedness" shame me out of thinking highly of the metre of "Maid of Athens." "To Thyrza" has that continuous catch and run of line to line which has been noted more than once, and which,

<sup>1</sup> Gay's "Molly Mog" has been suggested, and so, for that matter, might those delightful lines of Chesterfield's which I quoted at p. 528, and Lady Mary's "Good midum, when ladies are willing." But I want a *serious* example, and one where the dissyllabic ending occurs. Not all even of "Hudee" has the right cadence, and still less of the "Stanzas to Augusta." Indeed it is not certain that Byron *at this time* meant "Hudee" for a dissyllabic, for the modern Greek which he is adapting is *Χαῖδῆ*.

when it appears, is always a note of something more than prosodic adequacy "She walks in beauty" and "The Assyrian came down" may rank with "When we two parted" and the "Maid" as coins of verse of which long currency has not in the least reduced the value, and, as I dare anything in this book, I shall join "There be none of Beauty's daughters" to them. The final Missolonghi verses—which atone for so much in substance, and, with a little more supremacy of expression, might almost be accepted as payment in full—exhibit admirably the effect, to which attention has so often been drawn, of a shortened last line. None of these is actually supreme. Byron never was supreme here, as he certainly was not elsewhere in poetry, but they are all more than competent<sup>1</sup>. The blank verse of the "Dream" and of "Darkness" is very much more than competent—if it were not for the accursed smatch of rhetoric in the bad sense which always mars a draught of Byron, there would be even some consummateness about them. As for his couplets, the heroics are fair eighteenth-century standard with a good deal of "devil" infused into that sometimes rather spiritless body, and his octosyllables, regular or free, are Scott dosed in the same sort of way. The well-known patches of *Parisina* and the *Bride of Corinth* show him at his best here. But it is in the Spenserians of *Childe Harold* and the "Frenians" of *Beppo* and *Don Juan* that Byron's prosodic interest probably lies for most people.

I do not and cannot like his Spenserians, despite the *tours de force*, known to everybody, that he has executed

<sup>1</sup> Another remarkable experiment is to be found in the stanzas beginning

Could Love for ever  
Run like a river  
And Time's endeavour  
Be tried in vain

This also has been enormously improved upon, but Byron has given the model. I think, by the way, that "When we two parted" is a valuable key to that remarkable song in *The Deformed Transformed* which has been referred to before as an apparent stronghold for the amphibrachists.

The black bands came over  
The Alps and their snow

Both are really only unequally split up iambic dimeters

in them. It is not that the ingrained vulgarity which is Byron's hopeless fault breaks out in the Preface of *Childe Harold*—though vulgarity and Spenser can no more keep house together than banality and Milton. It is not that the sham sincerity and the sham strength, which attract some people and repel others, are of all other things most alien from a metric that is as true to an unaggressive yet irresistible sweetness and truth as its own *Una*. There are some very plain, unvarnished, un-“high-falutin” reasons why Byron's Spenserian “will not do” technically and mechanically. In the first place, he has not only not got the right line to build it of, but he has got a hopelessly wrong one. The Byronic line is almost always neither more nor less than a half-couplet of very fair, sometimes excellent quality, more or less regularly middle-paused<sup>1</sup>. We said of old that *Lycidas* was blank verse rhyme-tipped in a special manner for a special purpose, we may say now that *Childe Harold* is couplets with their rhymes wrenched into Spenserian order, and with a Drydenian, not a Spenserian, Alexandrine thrust in at regular (and therefore hopelessly un-Drydenian) intervals. That there are not seldom some fine results of this medley, this biblical “confusion”, that Ardennes waves her leaves not without harmonious rustle, and that the deep and dark-blue ocean rolls majestically enough, that Venice and the Rhine might be celebrated in worse vessels or vehicles—one need not deny.

But, all the while, within we hear  
How sweet, how different a thing—

a thing which we have a right to hear, for Byron has been rash enough to force the hearing of it on us—the music of the song of Phædria and of the incantations of the Bower of Bliss, the setting of the Caves of Despair

<sup>1</sup> Spenser (*v. sup.* vol. 1 p. 368 note) is always careful to make pauses in the individual lines, unless for special reasons, as various and as little correspondent as possible. Byron, as he always is, is prodigal of strong and generally centripetal breaks. Nor, as a general rule, does Byron know how to fit on the Alexandrine so as to make it an organic part of the stanza. It may be said, with some support from his own Preface, that he had Beattie rather than Spenser before him, but I hardly think this mends matters.

and of Mammon, the magical caroché of quest and fight, of pageant and dream. And we do not want his lordship's shoddy—even though Spenser and Dryden, Pope and Scott, are the victims of the devil<sup>1</sup> of it—any more than that day.

He would, I think, if he had ever tried it, have managed rhyme-royal even worse than he managed the Spenserian. For the power of this last metre is so great that, even mismanaged by a man who himself has any power at all, it cannot wholly fail, and there is no doubt, as has been already acknowledged, that Byron's best efforts in it are fine poetical rhetoric, or rhetorical poetry of a bastard but vigorous growth. Now rhyme-royal, as we have seen, can easily be very bad indeed, and its peculiar merit of plangency, without turmoil and "to-do," was not one that Byron was likely to develop.

But with the metre that stands between them he was far luckier. I have once or twice hinted that the octave, <sup>his serio-comic ottava</sup> for purely serious purposes, does not seem to me a metre exactly at home in English, despite the numerous fine things that we have had in it from Chaucer onward. But in the land of its origin, as most people know, it was largely employed for purposes which were either not wholly serious or deliberately serio-comic. The credit of discovering how this gift of the metre could be developed in English has generally, and I doubt not rightly, been given to that remarkable master of wit and wisdom, John Hookham Frere, in *The Monks and the Giants*. I have pointed out, in speaking of Fairfax's *Tasso*, the tendency of the couplet to separate itself from the sixain, and collect itself into a sort of *pointe*. The value of this peculiarity for bulesque or serio-comic purposes is obvious, and can hardly be exaggerated—in fact, in the rhyme-royal, Sir Francis Kynaston had frequently availed himself of it nearly half a century later than Fairfax. But stanzas were rapidly going out of fashion then, and when the eighteenth century tried them for bulesque it

<sup>1</sup> This is not bad language. The "devil" is the actual name of the machine which tears up old stuff into the wisps from which shoddy is rewoven.

blundered into the Spenserian, which is usually impatient of this catachresis, and actually (as we know it did in Shenstone's case) converts the scoffers by its own power. Frere<sup>1</sup> knew better, and when "the brothers Whistlecraft" wrote their "Prospectus and Specimen of a National Epic" in 1813, and the survivor of them began to publish it four years later, the lesson of Ariosto himself to no small extent, but of Pulci and Berni still more, had borne almost full fruit.

Digression on  
Frere

In *The Monks and the Giants* the handling of *Beppo*, *Don Juan*, and the *Vision of Judgment* is all ready. The means consist chiefly of a double management of the separated couplet just referred to. Sometimes the poet avails himself of it, as it were to "turn upon himself" after having written a tolerably serious sixain he crowns it with a comic cap-and-bells. At other times he lets the whole proceed to this culmination or explosion. Another very important point illustrates the curious chance-medleys of prosodic biology. Double rhymes are necessities in Italian, and there have no *essentially* comic tendency. In English they have something of the sort, while triple rhymes require the utmost care in management, and the strongest infusion of passion of some kind, to save them from the burlesque effect. Now the serio-comic writer has unmatched opportunities, with these lengthened echoes, in the octave.

Byron's adop-  
tion of it

Frere used them uncommonly well,<sup>2</sup> but Byron, beyond

<sup>1</sup> Frere's *Works* (1871) are full of practical and not devoid (*v. inf.* chap. iv.) of preceptist interest as regards prosody. But "Whistlecraft" can be found, more accessibly and cheaply, in a volume of the late Professor Henry Morley's "Crisbrooke Library," *Poodies and Burlesque Poies* (London, 1890). It is only fair to Gay to remember that he did use the octave in his "Welcome from Greece" to Pope, but he has not there mastered the full effect of the final couplet.

<sup>2</sup> Seldom better, perhaps, than in this early stanza

We must take care in our poetic cruise  
And never hold a single tack too long,  
Therefore my versatile ingenious muse  
Takes leave of this illiterate, low bred throng,  
Intending to present superior views  
Which to genteeler company belong,  
And show the higher orders of society  
Behaving with politeness and propriety

all doubt, used them better. I do not know that he ever did things much better than in *Beppo* itself, but the comparative insignificance of scale and subject there, and the rather cheap indulgence of personal and political "black-guarding" in the *Vision*, necessarily make *Don Juan* the chief place of exercise and illustration. There is hardly a better example, in this history which we are trying to tell of pre-established harmony between measure and matter, than that most happily interrupted poem, which could hardly have given us anything better than it gives if it had gone on for another sixteen or sixty cantos, which, in going on, would probably have degenerated into stock satire of a society already becoming unfamiliar to the writer, and which actually contains variety enough to satisfy the most restless hater of monotony, and accomplishment enough to defeat Momus himself.

There are periods when, in

*Don Juan*

A neat, snug study on a winter's night,

without the distractions which the poet himself suggests as alternatives or additions to a "book," one wonders whether it would not have been better that Byron should have written nothing but *Don Juan*. It is difficult to believe that it can ever have done any serious harm to any one, it certainly has given many abundance of not in the least disreputable delight, and, once more, it is such a marriage of spirit and form<sup>1</sup>. Once more, as in all the great instances—Chaucerian riding rhyme, Spenserian stanza, Shakespearian or Miltonic blank verse (each in its way the greatest), Caroline lyrics, the heroic onslaught of Dryden, and the satiric *revue* of Pope,—the thing is almost unthinkable in any other measure. He has made very good play with the serious capacities of the stanza where it is necessary—for instance, in the death of Haidée, and the adaptation goes, with constant improvement, right through the middle stages of description, half-ironic reasoning, and the like, to the definite burlesque. The omnipresence—or at least the ever-sensible neighbourhood—of this latter mood renders the

Byronic bad taste comparatively innocuous, the serious or neutral episodes save it from that mere perpetual "thorn-crackling" laugh which is not a whit less tiresome, and distinctly more irritating, than the dullest continuity of platitude. And, guiding and tending and giving piquancy to all, goes the saucy metre, with lift of skirt and pirouette and curtsy of fantastic rhyme, and quantly twisted final couplet-ends, and becks and wreathed smiles of word-play—a little bit of the courtesan perhaps in it, a great deal of the coquette, but with almost all the qualities of an agreeable and accomplished companion for pastime. No there are plenty of things to be said against Byron as a poet, and his fluency and volume have prevented his versification from being always impeccable. But on the whole of that score he has very little to fear on the part of it which concerns his serio-comic *ottava*, nothing.

Shelley

There is, however, for some of us at least, always the feeling that we are, with Byron, in the outer courts of poetry, there can hardly be any such in regard to the two poets to whom we come next. Here, as elsewhere, the pair differ curiously, and it will be better in every way to work out the differences by examination than to state them beforehand in ostentatious antithesis. One of the chief points of interest with Shelley arises from the fact, attested by the indisputable authority of Peacock, that his insensibility to technical music was nearly if not quite as great as Scott's. Now, even those who, following the vague popular opinion of to-day that Scott is only a second-class poet, try to make him out a second- or third-class master of poetical music, will hardly say that of the author of *Adonais* and the "Skylark," of "O World! O Life! O Time!" and "I arise from dreams of thee," of "To Constantia Singing" and "The Invitation" and "The Recollection."

Undeliberateness of his prosody

That Shelley paid much conscious attention to prosody I should doubt. The almost entire absence of any important reference to it in the *Defence of Poetry*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Such references as those we do find are quite general. The most noteworthy of them, I think, is this: "Every great poet must inevitably innovate

and in his letters, though not decisive, is strongly against his having cumbered himself about these matters, and I think that he might have supplied an additional illustration of his famous remark about the mutton and the gunshop if the subject had been subjected to his treatment. As the reader by this time knows, I find nothing in the least disconcerting or disappointing in this, still less anything surprising. It was Shelley's business not to talk, or even to think, about making great prosody, but to make it. And he made it. Indeed the very shortcomings in his practice are interesting in the highest degree, for they are quite evidently *not* attempts at something that he could not do, *not* attempts at something that he had not yet quite learnt to do, but either original refashionings, or else sheer accidental carelessnesses due in some cases to absence of *revision*, and in some perhaps merely to the untoward and troublesome circumstances of the publication of his books.

Although, perhaps,

The  
"Juvenilia"

The nymph *Contrasta*, with her treacherous wiles,

has had too much influence on most people who have spoken of Shelley's "Juvenilia," it would, no doubt, be rather superfluous to spend much time on their prosody. The most interesting thing—imitative, and awkwardly imitative, as it is for the most part—is the remarkable song, "Fierce roars the midnight storm," in *Victor and Cazire*, which has a conjectured plagiarism from Monk Lewis, a certain resemblance to FitzEustace's song in *Marmion*, and, as I think, an almost more certain resemblance, though in another sense, to Thackeray's more and less serious "Willow Songs" in the *FitzBoodle Papers*.<sup>1</sup> Although this has some of the rather lumbering and

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upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification." Most true, and specially well seen of Shelley himself. But that he proceeds from it to talk of the "vulgar error" of distinguishing between poets and prose writers shows that, at the moment, he was nearer to Wordsworth and farther from Apollo than usual.

<sup>1</sup> If any one cares to follow this curious matter up he may consult Dr. Garnett's original reprint of *Victor and Cazire* (London, 1898) and the "Oxford" edition of Thackeray's *Works*, iv 19 sq.



wallowing trisyllabics, imitated from the German, of the Lewisian versification, it has echo and quick, not dead, quality about it. But even here it would have been difficult, and with most of the rest it would have been impossible, for the most ingenious critic to tell whether, prosodically as in other ways, the writer was going to become a poet or a poetaster.

*Queen Mab*

With *Queen Mab* it is not so. Here, too, there is imitation of the frankest and most undisguised character, for Shelley has not only taken the unrhymed short Pindaric form of *Thalaba*, but has, with that curious, audacious, unhumorous, childlike innocence which distinguished him throughout, thrown the first stanza into the very mould of Southey's first. Yet he has not kept to this lyric form, but has passed frequently into ordinary blank verse—not of the pattern that he was soon to reach, a little indeterminate, and, where determined, inclining towards the dramatic, but still good. If I had had to review *Queen Mab* in 1813 I should have said that it contained a good deal of nonsense, some of it mischievous, but that the author was pretty certainly a poet, and most certainly no small master of prosody already.

When, years afterwards, he extracted and refashioned from this experiment *The Demon of the World*, Mrs Shelley thought that he "changed somewhat the versification, and made other alterations scarcely to be called improvements." It is not clear whether "other" is intended to exclude or include the versification with or from those which were not improvements, but if the much-tried and ever-faithful Mary meant to include it, I am bound to differ with her in part. He has certainly rather spoilt the first stanza, but he has decidedly improved the blank verse.

His blank  
verse from  
*Alastor*  
onwards

It was natural that he should do so, for by this time (1821) he had long ago attained his own remarkable command of that difficult vehicle—a command which he obtained to some extent from Wordsworth, which Browning endeavoured to imitate in *Pauline* and even later, though he changed it greatly afterwards, but which

is elsewhere, I think, hardly to be found. It is, indeed, nearly complete in *Alastor*, only two years younger than *Queen Mab* itself. Its starting-point, as has been said, is Wordsworth's very best brand of the verse, such as that of the finest parts of "Tintern Abbey," to which the overture of *Alastor* is actually akin in subject, this overture thus making, with the other to *Queen Mab* and its relation to *Thalaba*, a curious double instance of the way in which the most original of poets may start himself with a simply borrowed capital. But Shelley soon parts company from Wordsworth in spirit, and though he retains the suggestion of form, blends it with other suggestions of Milton and Shakespeare, and some things not in either—a certain breathlessness (caught and never got rid of by Browning), plenty of trisyllabic feet, very few, though some, redundant syllables,<sup>1</sup> a love for brilliant, opal-like spots of colour, and a predilection for very strong full-stop pauses at or near the middle, which, if it were not for diversity of spirit, might suggest Thomson or even (may the saints absolve me!) Glover. Here there is no difficulty in agreeing with Mrs Shelley, who pronounces the versification "peculiarly melodious." I know few poems more delightful to read scanningly to oneself than *Alastor*.

The command of this admirable vehicle Shelley, as has been said, always retained, but he was not contented with it. In fact all forms of poetry seem to have come naturally to him. Others, with great piece of labour, may have attained this freedom, but he was free-born—that is, when he was born at all, for it must be admitted that the "Juvenilia" are in this respect ante-natal. Exactly why *Laon and Cythna* or *The Revolt of Islam* employed the Spenserian it might be impossible to say. No two poets have been more akin on larger sides of their nature than Spenser and Shelley, and Shelley was to produce later, in *Adonais*, the most magnificent, if not the most exact,

His early  
Spenserians

<sup>1</sup> It may be laid down generally that any one who does not recognise the danger of very frequent redundancy in dramatic blank verse, or of more than very sparing redundancy in non dramatic, has not got its secret.

modern examples of the great metre But I should not be surprised if *Childe Harold* had something to do, if only by an accident of time, with the selection, and occasionally a not wholly beneficent influence seems to be exerted either by it, or by Shelley's own practice in blank verse just noticed He is rather too lavish of the strong middle stop, of which, in Spenser, you may turn page after page without finding a single example But his Alexandrines are much better moulded on than Byron's, and for the pure picture effects, which are so frequent in this beautiful poem, the stanza, as is well known, "hath no fellow" There is, however, a certain *twist* about Shelley's Spenserians, of which we may say more when we come to *Adonais* itself

*Prince  
Athanasz and  
the tercet*

A prosodic text, for which we have been long waiting, at last presents itself to us in *Prince Athanasz*<sup>1</sup> Why—the question has already been suggested above—do English poets seem so shy of *terza rima*, or why is it so shy of them? To say that *Prince Athanasz* also is beautiful is merely to say that it is Shelley's, and past 1815 But its measure has very little to do with its beauty one thinks very little about it Indeed, I always feel inclined myself, as I generally do with English tercets, to read on as if it were a sort of interchained couplet verse Whether what Drayton would call "the attraction of the Gemell" for the English ear works too powerfully on this so near neighbour to it, I cannot say Sometimes I have also imagined a metaphysical connection with the double rhyme, which comes naturally and inevitably in Italian, and is anything but inevitable, if it is not in the least unnatural, in English But certainly that powerful and dangerous engine, the pause, comes into play here Once more I run my eye down page after page of Dante, finding hardly a single strong internal stop except at the beginning of a speech Shelley has endeavoured to follow this, but in so short

<sup>1</sup> The "Ode to the West Wind" has the peculiarity of being in batches—five quatrains each divided into four triplets and a couplet, and almost invariably run together It is really a kind of sonnet-sequence, though the triplets, separately regarded, are in *terza rima*

a stanza, and with mostly single rhymes, it does not quite do. This is not a mere fancy, or a mere trumped-up thing to suit the immediate purpose. The double rhyme, like the redundant syllable generally, has a curious reflex action. It fills, and so seems in a way to retard, the interval between the two lines. But, in filling, it *bridges* that interval, and obliterates the sharpest edges of its banks. Thus the Dantean tercet is, despite its slow motion and not great volume, curiously *integral*, a point which Dante carefully guards and watches by avoiding as much as he possibly can the running of one tercet into another. Now, this point Shelley as constantly neglects. There are only, I think, four completely isolated tercets in *Prince Athanase*, between forty and fifty actually enjamb, and most of the rest are separated only by commas. In one place a batch of half-a-score stanzas runs without any end-stop at all, producing an effect more opposite to that of any thirty lines of Dante than might have seemed possible in an apparently identical metre. And in the "West Wind," out of twenty tercets twelve are in similar case. We may take this matter up yet again on *The Triumph of Life*, and more fully still on Canon Dixon's *Mano*<sup>1</sup>

*Rosalind and Helen* gives yet a fresh instance of Shelley's propensity and ability to take any metre that suggested itself and make it his own. The *libertine* *Rosalind and Helen*  
Shelley's octo-  
syllables octosyllable, substituted, lengthened, varied into ballad and other stanzas, had already been solidly established as a poetic vehicle by Coleridge and Scott and Byron. Shelley shows himself completely master of it, though perhaps he does not show such exquisiteness in the mastery as he was afterwards to do in the purer but still free octosyllables of shorter pieces in his very last stage. It ends with a batch of very beautiful *decasyllables*,

<sup>1</sup> I am bound to say that unrhymed *terza*, with frequent but not uniform redundancy, such as Longfellow used in his translation of the *Commedia*, seems to me one of the most abominable measures ever invented. And that I am none of the decrers of Longfellow any one may see who looks at a little volume of *Selections from him* (Edinburgh, 1906), or indeed at what follows on him later in this volume.

rhymed in a fashion which for once is absolutely irreducible to any regular order

*Julian and  
Maddalo*  
his heroics

*Julian and Maddalo*, on the other hand, is in continuous enjambed heroic couplets *Rimini*-fashioned, but with Shelley's curious combination of delicacy and strength in utterance, instead of Hunt's rather loose-lipped and loose-legged fluency. In the two great dramas we have naturally, according to their subject and scheme, blank verse largely alternated with lyric, and blank verse alone. There cannot, I think, be much doubt that Shelley's blank verse was better suited for mixed than for pure usage. The longer speeches of *The Cenci* contain some of the greatest things—perhaps the greatest—in the later and more literary English serious drama, and their vehicle carries them off nobly. But it is less well fitted for conversation, and the artificiality which mars the whole of that drama is promoted, not hindered, by it there.

Blank verse  
and other  
metrics in  
drama

On the other hand, *Prometheus Unbound* is as great a triumph prosodically as in other ways, perhaps even a greater. It is more flawless in this respect than even *Adonais*, though its larger bulk and greater variety would seem to invite flaws to show themselves. The triumph arises, not only from the beauty of particular passages, but from the intimate union and congruity of the blank verse with the lyrics themselves. The drawback of the modern choric drama as a rule is that this unity does not exist: there is at best an agreeable contrast, at worst a positive discord, between dialogue and chorus. Here such a thing as the magnificent opening speech—the central passage of which has no superior in a certain kind of rather flamboyant blanks—passes quite naturally into the Earth-voices and the songs of the Oceanides, and these again into the blank verse, and so throughout. To go, showman-fashion, through *Prometheus* and exhibit the single beauties of passage after passage would take a chapter, if not a Book. I can only say that in all the long procession and pageant of English poetry which it has been my good fortune to survey as I have been

*Prometheus  
Unbound*

preparing and writing this History, nothing has ever presented itself, and nothing, I think, will present itself, in such a combination of prosodic beauty and variety as this. The famous words of Asia<sup>1</sup> on the Spirit voice are the only possible description of the sensations of the reader of *Prometheus Unbound* who is worthy to read it. This was the heritage of which seven centuries of poetic labour and experiment from Godric to Coleridge had put English poetry in possession, and Shelley's was the golden key that threw it open to enjoyment.

The fact is that at this time (1819) Shelley had fully entered into his prosodic kingdom. Look at *The Masque of Anarchy*.<sup>The Masque of Anarchy, etc</sup> The present writer has not a tear or a puff of indignation to waste over "Peterloo"—of which he happens to know the history pretty intimately, and which, though a very much bungled thing, was not a crime at all, nor even, had it been better done, a blunder. Yet he thinks *The Masque of Anarchy* an admirable piece of verse, with one of the powers of the trochee—its capacity for expressing retained or reined-in feeling, be it passion, or satire, or rage—perfectly mastered, and with the occasional iambic alternations capitally managed. This piece shows partly, and *Peter Bell the Third* shows still more, that Shelley's sense of humour, though intermittent and sometimes warped, was not in the least like Milton's, a non-existent faculty, but only required heaven-sent moments to develop it. It is developed prosodically, and I can assure any incredulous reader that prosodic humour is quite a real thing, though, unfortunately, some would-be humorous verse-writers have little or no command of it. In *Peter* it is very intermittent, but at the best excellent, giving us a fresh illustration of the remarkable powers of

<sup>1</sup> My soul is an enchanted boat  
Which like a sleeping swan doth float  
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing,  
And thine doth like an angel sit  
Beside a [the ?] helm conducting it,  
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.

<sup>2</sup> I apologise for this outbreak, as I did in the case of Spenser, but one cannot help these things now and then.

the quintet, which seems born for the purpose of chaiging the ordinary quatrain with a second and special intention<sup>1</sup> And there is something of this prosodic humour in the heroics of the *Epistle to Maria Gisborne*—the satiric drama to the serious one of *Alastor* in point of veisification

*The Witch of  
Atlas and the  
octave*

*Kubla Khan* has often been taken as the test-poem to decide whether a man cares for poetry as poetry, or whether he cares for it as expressing some sentiment, or conveying some meaning, which is agreeable or seems respectable to him It will serve, certainly, but I am not sure that *The Witch of Atlas* ~~is not a~~ better—it certainly is a severer—~~basanos~~ Mary Shelley—for reasons perfectly comprehensible, and illustrated by one or two touching stories of her later life and conversation—objected to it as having “no human interest” I should have said it had a great deal, at least I believe myself to be human, and it has a very intense interest for me But that is perhaps beyond our province Its prosodic interest is very nearly supreme It is to me the only example of the octave in English serious, or mainly serious verse, which is perfectly satisfactory, and I am not sure that this is not due to the fact that Shelley has, in it, caught from Byron, and “translated” with his own ethercalising touch, some—one can hardly say comic, one must certainly not say satiric or burlesque—but “non-tragic” quality He has made it utterly fanciful—a true “fairy way of writing”—a rather less holy but lighter companion to the Spenserian Like the *Prometheus*, the *Witch* is pure prosodic nectar, one must look back at least to the close of *Comus* for anything of their kind Indeed, much admirable work as we have since had—and how admirable it has been the pages that follow will, I hope, serve, however inadequately, to tell—I do not know that any equally considerable things have

<sup>1</sup> Like gentle rains, on the dry plains,  
Making that green which lute was grey,  
Or like the sudden moon that stains  
Some gloomy chamber's window-panes  
With a broad light like day

been added since to this triad of achieved and continuous lyrical or quasi-lyrical narrative<sup>1</sup>

But that "going from strength to strength," which is *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais* so noteworthy in Shelley's last years, and which makes one lose oneself in wonder as to what he might have done, is as noticeable in his mere prosodic aspects as in his general poetic quality. The enjambed couplets of *Epipsychidion* show an immense advance on *Julian and Maddalo*, entirely avoiding that limpness which, as we have seen, is the curse of the species, and attaining a rhymed verse-paragraph which, quite unlike *Lycidas* in particular effect, resembles it in belonging to the general class of "rhymed blank verse"—rhymed verse that acquires the powers of blank, and blank verse that borrows the attraction of rhyme.

And then there is *Adonais*.

*Adonais* is not faultless (faultlessness, thank Heaven! could never be included in the list of Shelley's faults), and some of its shortcomings are not exactly beauty-spots. He uses double rhymes, which, though not unexampled in the great original, are always against the metre, and, with his usual lack of cold-blooded revision, he has certain touches here and there of *cliché* and *cheville*. But in the best of it (which means nearly the whole), and exercising his full rights of Spenseian inheritance, he has combined the pictorial power of the *Faerie Queene* with the mystic ardour of the *Four Hymns*, the sweetness of part of the *Calendar*, the intensity—in sorrow now, not in love—of the *Epithalamion*, adding his own marvellous

<sup>1</sup> For the *Prometheus* and *Comus* are much more narrative *par personnages*, as the excellent Old French phrase has it, than drama. The *Witch* herself is difficult to sample, she is so perfect, but here is a stanza, literally the first of the first page opened.

This lady never slept, but lay in trance  
All night within the fountain, as in sleep  
Its emerald crags glow'd in her beauty's glance;  
Through the green splendour of the water deep  
She saw the constellations reel and dance  
Like fire flies, and withal did ever keep  
The tenor of her contemplations calm,  
With open eyes, closed feet, and folded palm

The marriage of rhythm and picture here was certainly made in heaven



idiosyncrasy of phrase. The opening, the great and well-known passages from the entry of the *Dreams* to the simile of the dome, the towering magnificence of the final apostrophe, and some of the fragments not incorporated, do not merely exemplify to the full the power of this wonderful metre they add to it.

*The Triumph  
of Life, etc*

*Hellas* and the various dramatic fragments require little addition to the comments which have already been made on Shelley's blank verse, whether plain or mixed, and I do not know that much more is wanted on the tercets of that unique torso *The Triumph of Life*, in which it has always appeared to me that we get close to the quintessence of Shelleyism on the less sensuous side. He has, however, not got rid of what seems to me the metricidal (or *metroktonic*) overlapping. And one curious thing has struck me. In adopting, at the close of the *Proem*, a quatrain instead of a tercet, he has of course authority from Dante. But it is exceedingly noteworthy—to me at least—that whereas in Dante's terminal quatrains we always feel the last line to be an addition—to be, as it were, extra-stanzaic—Shelley's four lines read quite homogeneously and integrally, as if they meant to be such.

*The smaller  
lyrics, etc*

The paradise of the smaller lyrics cannot be wandered through at leisure, as I would so fain wander through it. But it illustrates almost *passim*, in the literal sense, that omnipotence of metrical adoption and adaptation which has been noted. Even the "Lines"<sup>1</sup> which Mrs Shelley put as last dated (November 1815) of the "Early Poems" are quite obvious *Ancient Mariner* touched to a Shelleyan issue. From the time when the yearly arrangement begins we need not mention poems, however poetically consummate, which are in metres already noticed or in

<sup>1</sup> The cold earth slept below,  
Above the cold sky shone,  
And all around  
With a chilling sound,  
From caves of ice and fields of snow,  
The breath of night like death did flow  
Beneath the sinking moon

those which require no special comment. But such a thing, for instance, as the transformation of the Spenserian in "To Constantia Singing" is of the kind that *must* be noticed. It is a duplicate, in subject and spirit, of the song in *Prometheus* noted above, but entirely different in form. Of the pure *novena* it keeps nothing but the number of lines and the final Alexandrine, and these only in the first stanzas, the others being eleven-lined, while even the interior line-lengths are irregular. But the irregularity corresponds to the fluctuation of the music and the passion alike, and the whole is perfectly symphonic<sup>1</sup>.

"Ozymandias," good as it is, is chiefly a text for the very well-known sermon that Shelley had no particular bent ~~towards~~ the sonnet. Some people would, I suppose, say that he did not like its restraint, and without definitely countering this, I should say that it neither afforded him room enough for expatiation, nor was distinctly lyrical enough for his short flights. But the splendid "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," like the later "Invitation" and "Ariel to Miranda," show an absolute mastery of the trochaic heptasyllable—sometimes, but not often, varied by the full iambic dimeter. And the "Stanzas written in Dejection" follow the "Constantia" in showing how fond Shelley was of taking the *novena* with Alexandrine ending and fingering the body of it into quite new forms with a marvellous result<sup>2</sup>. The "West

<sup>1</sup> The great last stanza must be given

I have no life, Constantia, now, but thee,  
 Whilst, like the world surrounding air, thy song  
 Flows on, and fills all things with melody —  
 Now is thy voice a tempest swift and strong,  
 On which, like one in trance upborne,  
 Secure o'er rocks and waves I sweep,  
 Rejoicing like a ~~cloud of morn-~~  
 Now 'tis the breath of summer night,  
 Which, when the starry waters sleep,  
 Round western isles, with incense blossoms bright,  
 Linger, suspends my soul in its voluptuous flight

<sup>2</sup> I may take as example a stanza in which all editions known to me keep what I feel quite sure is a wrong punctuation

I see the Deep's untrampled floor  
 With green and purple seaweeds strown,  
 I see the waves upon the shore  
 Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown,

Wind,"<sup>1</sup> with its already noted structure of a sonnet-sequence spaced out into tercets and couplets, contrasts curiously with the still more famous "Serenade," where the prosody is more musical than strictly prosodic, and is thus almost inextricable from the air when one has once heard it. In the "Sensitive Plant," on the other hand, the music is purely prosodic, and it gives us one of the most remarkable examples of the power of the continuous anapaest, not merely in songs—as Scott and Byron and Moore had shown it, as indeed it had been shown since Dryden, if not earlier,—not merely in light pieces as Prior and the eighteenth century had shown it, but in serious and even passionate poetry, and at no inconsiderable length. And there ought to be taken with this the less popular but extraordinarily powerful "Vision of the Sea," where the same metre is actually used for narrative purposes, and used as successfully as the almost inevitably impersonal or *unpersonal* character of Shelley's narrative admits.

Of 'The Cloud'<sup>2</sup> and "The Skylark"<sup>3</sup> who shall speak?

I sit upon the sands alone,  
The lightning of the noontide ocean  
Is flashing round me, and a tone  
Arises from its measured motion--

How sweet ' did any heart now share in my emotion !

The comma should surely be at "dissolved," not "showers."

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid sup* p. 106 note

<sup>2</sup> "Experimental" prosody is in vogue just now. I can give the reader an example of it which he may not dislike. The first proof of this passage was before me when M. Verner's remarkable book (*op inf* last chapter on "Prosodists") came into my hands. M. Verner says that "*la métrique traditionnelle renonce à diviser les pieds*" in "The Cloud" and *Christabel*. With the latter (*op sup*) I had dealt already. But it so happened that I had never deliberately scanned "The Cloud." I opened it, read it, without a moment's preparation, straight through, and I give my honour as a gentleman that every line, every word, every syllable fell into its foot place as if I had had a marked copy before me.

<sup>3</sup> The "Skylark" is perhaps one of those interesting prosodic *crucies* which may be *uncrossed* in more ways than one. It may seem to be an instance of the common, and delightful, *chassé-croisé* from iamb to trochee, and *vice versa*, the quatrain of short lines being trochaic, and the Alexandrine iambic. But I am not sure that the real cadence of the whole is not iambic, with acephalous or monosyllabic beginning in most of the "shorts." A few of these ("The pale | purple even," "What objects are | the fountain," etc.) supply a curious key, or tuning fork, by giving the full first foot.

The one is of the capital examples of triple, the other of the capital examples of common time in our prosody. The rush, almost the "rollick," of the first, the steady soar of the second, nearly exhaust the modes, in these special directions, of metrical motion, by means of articulate language, with an inarticulate *aura* of music surrounding. And "Arethusa," and the "Hymn of Pan," and the "World's Wanderer," and the "Fugitives," and "Remembrance," and almost dozens more of the shorter later poems? But there is one with which we must finish. It is perhaps impossible to find a better example, in little, of the way in which prosody can give poetry its own music—can clothe thought, not merely with a sensible body of words, but with an equally sensible vesture of sound,—than the immortal "Lament" ("O World! O Life! O Time!") The arrangement of the line-lengths, the selection of the vowel-values, the rise and fall of the whole stanza-construction, provide in prosody the "inevitableness" so often desiderated, so lightly talked of by the inventor of the phrase. "Sensibility to harmony of numbers and the power of producing it are invariably companions" of the other poetic faculties. Are they? Perhaps, if all poets were Shelleys. But, unfortunately, they are not<sup>1</sup>.

I anticipate, of course, the demurrer. "Oh, yes! these are beautiful poems, and the beauty of the poetry makes you see beautiful prosody in it." But I think I may fairly appeal to the whole of this book to rebut this. The best poetry will of course, best set off and be set off by the best prosody. But poetry is not "the pernicious and indubitate beggar Zenelophon." She will not look

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes one wonders whether, after Shelley, any other poets are wanted. But this is, of course, idle, the passion for poetry being, of all others, the most insatiable. And he would himself say, like Beatrice, *Volgete ed ascolta, Chè non pur nei miei occhi è Paradiso*. But the curious thing is that *this* poetry—this passionate interpretation of life, in beautiful language, set to harmonious measure—should have been pronounced, by one who in his day was a great critic, and not a small poet, "intellectual." If I am not mistaken, there are some chemical substances which it is almost impossible to isolate in their purity. Shelley effected the isolation of poetry, and (thank Heaven! not with all of us) he has paid the penalty of attempting, even with success, the apparently impossible.

so well in rags, and she will not transform them if she wears them; she will at most excuse and divert attention from them. And though beautiful singing robes will not dignify a poor song, they will still be beautiful.

Still, I must have quite failed to attain my own object in this rather elaborate survey of Shelley's prosody if I have not suggested to the reader that there is something peculiar about it—that he is in a way the exception which *disproves* Wordsworth's rule. With him susceptibility to almost any harmony of numbers, and the power of producing it, do follow or accompany the possession of other poetic gifts. And this crowning gift seems to have been bestowed upon him suddenly—as by his own Witch of Atlas. Without apparent study or preparation he passes from the most ordinary, or nearly the most ordinary, verse-making to the extraordinary blank verse of *Alastor* and thenceforward anything that he chooses to write—tercet and quatrain, octave and Spenserian, mixed lyric metres on the great and small scale, couplets, octosyllables—is all the same to him. The various feet come to him like the beasts to some mighty magician—iamb and trochee, anapæst and tribrach, show off their most cunning paces. He probably still takes half-unconscious suggestion from others, but he makes no "study" of them, and whatever he takes he transforms. If there is a slip anywhere, it is obviously nothing but oversight—it can hardly be called "carelessness," for Shelley was too much in a state of mild energuménism to be careless,—but "inability to attend to trifles." He is one of the very greatest of all practical prosodists—and one of the least deliberate.

Keats

With Keats, on the other hand, the process of deliberate pupilage, working itself out to mastery, is traceable all through. He gives expression to the revolt which accompanies his discipleship, with a definite precept-protest, in the well-known "Sleep and Poetry" quite early. That discipleship itself—to Leigh Hunt, to Leigh Hunt's masters, the Jacobean and Caroline "enjambers", to Spenser, to Chapman—is placarded all over the

"Juvenilia" and *Endymion*. The way in which, finding his education—his prosodic education—imperfect, he turns to Milton and Dryden for alternatives, astringents, tonics, is equally well known, as are the magnificent results when he has made the whole teaching his, and has emerged from school (alas! not for long) in such things as the *Eves*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, the great odes, and the last sonnets. But we must ourselves go through this process a little more in detail.

The earliest poems, regarded in this way, have, even of themselves, a different interest from that possessed by Shelley's. The prosodic initiation is more definite, more scholastic, and, as the case may be, either happier or not so happy. The Spenserians<sup>1</sup> which Armitage Brown told Lord Houghton were Keats's earliest preserved work and were written in his seventeenth year, are no great things, but they are, with whatever inequalities and infelicities of phrase, much nearer to Spenser's rhythm than even Shelley's finest, and no bad first draft for the magnificence of the *Eve of St. Agnes* later. On the other hand, the "Moorish" or Lewisian anapaests<sup>2</sup> of "To some Ladies" and its sequel are quite ludicrously bad. Keats was never good at fast metres, and he wisely gave them up. But the Miltonic "Ode to Apollo" sees him at home again. It is only lisped Miltonese, of course, but it is Miltonese, while the companion "Hymn"—a strange medley of unharmonised alternation like some of Words-

The early  
Poems

<sup>1</sup> Now Morning from her orient chamber came  
And her first footsteps touch'd a verdant hill,  
Crowning its tawny crest with amber flame,  
Silvering the untainted gushes of its rill,  
Which pure from mossy beds did down distil,  
And after parting beds of simple flowers,  
By many streams a little lake did fill,  
Which round its marge reflected woven bowers  
And in its middle space a sky that never lowers

<sup>2</sup> What though, while the wonders of nature exploring,  
I cannot your light mazy footsteps attend,  
Nor listen to accents that almost adoring  
Bless Cynthia's face, the enthusiast's friend

But it is almost a shame to quote these *incunabula*, and I only do it because they are such valuable signs and tokens

worth's worst things—is a complete failure. But he had already got the secret of the seven—not even the hideous jar<sup>1</sup> of “higher” and “Thalia” can prevent us from perceiving that in “Had'st thou lived in days of old” And then there is the most interesting of all the attempts. In *Calidore* and its induction, in “I stood tiptoe” and “Sleep and Poetry” and others, we come to the most famous and important of his followings, the experiments in the enjambed decasyllabic couplet. That he took this directly from Leigh Hunt is always said, and is probably in great part true. The motto of “I stood,” fully attributed to the *Story of Rimini*, might suffice for those who cannot discern, or who distrust, internal evidence. At the same time, the more I read the Jacobean and Caroline originals, the more convinced do I feel that Browne, Marmion, and probably Chamberlayne himself, had—whether at first or only later, but certainly before *Endymion* was finished—a great direct influence on Keats.

The Sonnets

Recurrence to this metre was promised in dealing with Leigh Hunt, but it may perhaps be best still postponed, though only for a very brief space, till we come to *Endymion* itself. Meanwhile something should be said of the early sonnets. Without allowing oneself to be too much biassed by

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,

by

The poetry of earth is never dead,

or by

Gloomy and loveliness have passed away,

it may, I think, be allowed that Keats showed more than usual aptitude for the form. At first sight it might seem hardly likely to suit his bent towards fluency, but, on the other hand, its qualities were exactly what were wanted to curb that fluency, and the intense vividness with which he could conceive and visualise incidents and

<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that some phoneticians have taken the part of this abomination. It may be laid down with confidence that though it is not desirable to say “Thaliah,” and still less to say “highurrr,” every English man who speaks correctly gives the “er” a different sound from the “a”—so that the rhyme is not even right as assonance.

phenomena found ample opportunity in it. The sonnet of thought was not for Keats—the sonnet of feeling, or of imagination in the Addisonian sense—that is to say, “imaging,”—was his in a very high degree. Even in the “Chapman” sonnet it is noticeable how the image of the “traveller” dominates it till it becomes an actual picture of Cortes and his band, against the sky and gazing on the sea. And so it is later whether “English” or “Italian” in form, they are all picture- and figure-sonnets, till the very last mirrors star and sea and snow and the breast of the beloved, the verse moving as softly as the swell and shimmer of the subjects.

But we must now come to *Endymion*, and the enjambed couplet in it and in its forerunners. I need not recapitulate at any length what has been said on this subject in the second volume,<sup>1</sup> but I may fairly remind the reader—“for his ease,” as they used to say, and for my own—that the two great dangers of it, as practised in the first half of the seventeenth century, were flaccidity and prolixity of verse, and—as apparently an almost necessary consequence—loss of strictness and clearly marked sequence in narrative and in composition generally. A tangle of verse was accompanied, but hardly punctuated or divided, by the rhymes and a tangle of story, description, argument, or what not, was hardly kept within any bounds of verse-sentence or even paragraph.

To these Leigh Hunt had added a third perilous quality, which, though it is near akin to those just described, is not, I think, a necessary result of them. I do not refer to the so-called “voluptuousness” of *Rimini* and *Endymion*—though this certainly is a feature of seventeenth-century poetry of the type, and has easy prosodic and metaphysical connections—but to a curious mawkish sentimentality of phrase which is by no means of the seventeenth century, but is a rather uncomely bastard between French eighteenth-century *sensiblerie* and the “simple” language of Wordsworth, and even of Coleridge in the “Young Ass.” Hunt altered *Rimini* in

<sup>1</sup> Especially in the chapter on “The Battle of the Couplets,” pp. 273-302



later editions considerably, but even after the alterations a good deal of this stuff remains—familiar contractions of “I’ve” and “I’ll,” conversational modern bathos like “May I come in,” etc.<sup>1</sup>

Keats exaggerated this tendency for a time, and, till he abandoned the manner almost or altogether, was a much greater sinner than Hunt himself in intricate prolixity of verse and meaning. He had from the first, an unfortunate fancy for the word “very,” which must have irritated men like Lockhart extremely

He will speak  
And tell thee that my prayer is *very* meek

Even in the beautiful “I stood,” the second line—

The air was cooling, and so *very* still

has a missishness about it that is rather maddening

Again, he is dangerously addicted to double rhymes, the peril whereof has been often pointed out in these pages, and his verse-sentences threaten almost the involution of *Pharonmida*, as where, in *Calidore*, fourteen lines tell us, without a full stop, how the hero finished embracing the ladies as he helped them to dismount, and how the chatelain greeted him, and several other things

Nevertheless all this early couplet is poetry and its prosodic character, when you compare it with that of *Rimini*, is as a winged angel to a tolerably nimble and graceful pedestrian. And though the faults are not gone when we come to *Endymion*—though they may seem to be even aggravated by the impediments which they give to the evolution of what should be a connected, and is a long-drawn-out story—the prosodic aid to the poetry is still more strongly present

The prosodic  
criticism in the  
*Quarterly*

It is, or ought to be, well known that the chief quarrel of the *Quarterly Reviewer* with Keats was directed, first to his diction and secondly to his versification. This critic, who has been too often mixed up in the general

<sup>1</sup> It is only fair to Hunt and Keats to remind the reader that this over-revolt against poetic diction was seldom more penitently exhibited than in the “I’m better now” of *Christabel* itself

mind with the author, whoever he was, of the much more discreditable attack in *Blackwood*, actually acknowledged "powers of language, traits of fancy, and gleams of genius" But he could not stomach the diction his objections to it being partly well-founded, but much more largely based on ignorance of the real history and principles of English And it is evident that the versification was simply anathema to him. Unluckily he lets us understand why, in repeated self-confessions which may be worth quoting together

"At first it appeared to us that Mr Keats had been amusing himself, and wearying his readers, with an immeasurable game at *bouts rimés*. He seems to us to write a line at random, and then he follows, not the thought excited by this line, but that suggested by the rhyme with which it concludes *There is hardly a complete couplet enclosing a complete idea throughout the book* He wanders from one subject to another, from the association not of ideas but of sounds, and the work is composed of hemistichs which, it is quite evident, have forced themselves on the author by the mere force of the catchwords on which they turn"

Later the critic comes even closer to pure prosody, dropping the test of meaning "He cannot indeed write a sentence, but perhaps he may be able to scan a line Let us see The following are specimens of his prosodial notions of our English heroic metre" Of "the following" we may select two or three, though all have lessons —

So plenteously all weed-hidden roots

Of some strange history, potent to send

Before the deep intoxication

The stubborn canvas for my voyage prepared

Now it will be perfectly evident to any one who has followed this *low* history of the Holy Grail of prosody—which, wherever it comes, feeds all lovers of English verse with the meats they love best—that the critic, whoever

he was, either knew nothing or reeked nothing of "our heroic metre" or of English verse generally, except as developed on the breviary of Bysshe by the practice of Pope. And it may be just pointed out in passing that one culprit indicated as possible by Byron's combination<sup>1</sup> of flippantly personal dislike and literary ignorance—Southey—could not possibly have written it, for Southey knew the ever-flowing verse of Browne and the rest as well as he knew Milton or Pope himself, and was fully aware that "-ion," until quite recently, was two syllables at the pleasure, and generally by the preference, of the poet. "There is hardly a complete couplet enclosing a complete idea in the whole book" Why should there be? What is the matter with

So plentifully all weed-hidden roots?

Nothing except that Mr Bysshe had said "'Beauteous' is two syllables", and so, of course, is "plent~~y~~/ous" "Potent" in its position can cover itself with the wings not merely of Milton but of Cowley, two contemporaries not very commonly found agreeing together, but it would have been execrated by Johnson. An "accent" on a monosyllabic preposition like "for" is not to be endured. Elsewhere, in the examples originally given, but not reprinted here, there are trisyllabic feet, "wrenched" accents, enjambment, and all sorts of horrors.

It is not, I hope, a vain boast to say that this History has shown them all, without exception, to be no horrors at all—to be not even imperfectly naturalised aliens, but free-born and true-born English folk, some of whom, like

Crocker, Cruwys, and Coplestone,  
When the Conqueror came, were all at home,

while the rest of them were not long behind him. That Keats's regimenting and drilling of his recruits was always

<sup>1</sup> Who killed John Keats

The poet priest Milman,  
So ready to kill man,  
Or *Southey*, or *Barrow*

But it seems to have been Crocker, as later in the Fannyson case

thoroughly judicious need not be contended. In the auxiliary division of diction, though the *Quarterly* man is more often wrong than right in his special censures, there is no doubt that the poet is sometimes peccant. It may be wrong, but I wish the trees had not "sprouted a shady boon," which appears to me rather a vile phrase, and too much in the "most beautified" line. I do not think—I know. I shall excite the immeasurable contempt of some of the younger sort—but I do *not* think that "dancing" rhymes very nicely to "sting," and when "*very very* deadliness did nip The motherly cheeks of Niobe," I wish it had not, for more reasons than one. When I read about the

Swart planet in the universe of deeds,

I bethink me of Ancient Pistol—not as I would. And the opening of the Third Book, for twenty lines at least, resembles nothing so much as a result of the combination of some wooden spoon among the University Wits of the late sixteenth century with the most spasmodic of Spasmodics in the mid-nineteenth.

All this is true, and no one except an uncritical person will be afraid to say it. But what does it matter? It is the sin—a very small and disproportionate sin, scarcely affecting a few score out of more than four thousand lines—of a solace which will never cease for all true lovers of English poetry. The faults are merely the less clean foam, the muddier-coloured eddies, of the torrent of fresh poetic language that was scouring the dry channels of neo-classic poetry. And though the critic has, apparently in half or whole ignorance, hit on some of the dangers of enjambed verse, its benefits more than compensate for them.

In pure versifying, indeed, there is hardly need to admit any fault but exuberance and want of castigation. The poet is perhaps still rather too fond of double rhymes, but the opening couplet, especially when its history is known,<sup>1</sup> is such a capital example of them at their best

<sup>1</sup> It is just possible that some may not know what is said on fair authority, that Keats first wrote

A thing of beauty is a *constant* joy

that it gives passports to the others, which are rarely as unhappy as some in the early poems. Otherwise, and reserving some slight question as to the extreme length of the verse-sentences, it is difficult to allow too much beauty to the verse, or too much appropriateness to its employment. The poet has mastered (though he might perhaps have employed it more frequently) the secret of now and then arresting the ~~torrent of his rhythm by striking~~ single, lines like

How tiptoe Night holds back her dark grey hood  
and

Into the starry hollows of the world,  
or by phrases of similar character, bridging the rhyme,  
but pausing the verse, as in

Faint-smiling like a star  
Through autumn mists,  
or

On light tiptoe divine  
A quivered Dian,

where something that Tennyson learnt will be seen. In fact Keats has more than glimpsed the great secret that, to write this kind of verse perfectly, you must make it blank verse rhymed, and must neutralise the looseness of rhyme itself with a due astringency of strong pause or weighty word. And thus he has made it, at its best, a marvellous medium. Such passages as that in the subterranean wanderings which is crowned by the apparition of Cybele, and the paragraph in the speech of Glaucus which begins "I touched no lute," yield to few things in English for prosodic adequacy — nay, supremacy. And where were the eyes of the *Quarterly* man when, in a place at which even the indolentest of reviewers generally glances—the end of a Book—he missed one of the neatest and completest thoughts expounded in a neat and complete couplet

The visions of the earth were gone and fled—  
He saw the giant sea above his head?

I do not think Dryden, who did not hate youth, would

have failed in recognition of this, or would have disdained to write it

That Keats—curiously free as he was from vanity—*Isabella and his octave* was unconscious of the merits of his metre is unthinkable, that he knew its defects is certain. Yet these were so much the defects of his own qualities that he could not at once get rid of them, and that they show themselves almost equally in the octave of *Isabella*. This was probably a bad choice for him, its rather negative character in English as a serious metre has been more than once dwelt on, while, though he did not employ it for the burlesque *Cap and Bells*, his command of comedy was much too uncertain to have made a great thing of it there. On the whole, it is the diction of *Isabella* rather than the actual metre that is to blame. The former is too often deplorable—the mawkishness which he so well knew to be his besetting sin nowhere appears worse than in the two opening lines,<sup>1</sup> and it recurs too often. On the other hand, though there never appears that evident and pre-determined mating between metre and substance which we find in the *Witch of Atlas*, the famous, and justly famous, purple patches, such as the second and third stanzas and the magnificent fifty-third—

And she forgot the stars, the moon, the sun,

find no ill vehicle allotted to them. Yet I have always been sorry, since I began to understand the nature of rhythms a little, that Keats did not try rhyme-royal here, for the two effects which he wanted, the pictorial and the plangent, can be got out of it, in combination, as out of hardly any other metre. It would, however, with its concluding couplet, hardly have supplied the tonics, the styptics—almost the “cor[ro]sives” as they used to say—that were required to correct his tendency to a fluent effeminacy. He sought the right physicians when he turned to profit by the solemn grandeur of Milton’s blank verse, the varied vigour of Dryden’s couplet, and the less

<sup>1</sup> Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!  
Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love’s eye

tightly girt, but not in the least loose or slipshod, grace of the Spenserian

*Lamia* and the  
improved  
couplet

Leigh Hunt, with the catholicity which was his saving virtue, had appreciated Dryden, and had actually used the triplet and the Alexandrine in *Rimini*. But his appreciation, or at least his imitation, had stopped at variety, without attaining to the additional effects of majesty and grace—of variation in the music of vowel and word, as well as in the mere versification—which these offer. Keats, in *Lamia*, showed himself very well aware of these possibilities, while at the same time he obtained from Dryden a “stalk of cable hemp”—an *aqua vitae* of energetic phrase—which at once girded and stiffened the somewhat flaccid figure of his earlier couplet, and gave body and “racc” to its rather excessive sweetness. We know, as an actual fact, that he wrote *Lamia* after much study of Dryden, we could have known it without any external evidence at all. There are few happier results of such study, and I own that sometimes I like *Lamia* best of all its author's longer poems, though no doubt it falls below the *Eves*, and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and the best of the Odes. It is of course a blend, and there are some people who do not like blends, but it is a blend of extraordinary attractiveness, and, for my own part, if poets are allowed to continue their work in the other world—a permission which would have to be granted on rigid conditions and principles of selection—the work of Keats which I should like to see best would be that in which he has even more thoroughly digested, and made his own, the metric of *Lamia*. The combination of the general enjambed system, which Dryden had discarded, with the devices which he introduced to chequer and enliven the stopped form, justifies itself most amply. The Alexandrines are splendid—not merely the universally known last,<sup>1</sup> but such earlier ones as

While, like held breath, the stars drew in their panting fires  
And it is astonishing how the never-ending flow of

<sup>1</sup> And in its marriage robe the heavy body wound

Marmion or Chamberlayne is improved by such a little plunge and arrest as the triplet—

What taste of purer air hast thou to soothe  
My essence? What serener palaces  
Where I may all my many senses please  
And by mysterious sleights a hundred thirsts appease?

Even in the mere single line he has got the real Drydenian vigour, as in

To dull the nice remembrance of my home,  
while such a couplet-paragraph as that beginning

As men talk in a dream

I hardly know where else to find

But there was another agent, also set at work by study, in the strengthening of the prosodic quality of *Lamia*, in addition to Drydenian rhythm and line-scheme. This agent was Miltonic phrase, not seldom arranging itself into Miltonic rather than Drydenian measure, as in "Surely high inspired," "the brilliance feminine," and even

Whereat the star of Lethe *not delayed*  
His rosy eloquence

It was not, however, in *Lamia* that Keats displayed to the full this other influence, but in *Hyperion*. The interesting minor question of the order and relations of the two versions of that poem concerns this part of the matter, but not in a very important degree. It is not surprising that Lord Houghton, after hesitating whether *The Fall of Hyperion a Dream* was revisal or draft, should have inclined to the latter supposition, for the prosody of the *Dream*<sup>1</sup> is much nearer to that of *Endymion* than the prosody of the "epic fragment," as they call it. It is evident, however, even without the external evidence that has been produced,<sup>2</sup> and without seeing in it any

*Hyperion* and  
its blank  
verse

<sup>1</sup> Influence of Dante has been suggested in it, and if Keats was sufficiently exposed thereto, he would pretty certainly have caught something from it.

<sup>2</sup> For the whole question the places of study are, of course, Professor de Selincourt's editions of Keats generally, and of the recovered MS of the *Dream* in particular.



decline of power, that Keats might very well have perceived that his magnificent *pastiche* is, after all, a *pastiche*. Those who, like Mr Sidney Colvin, call this "hardly Miltonic" in any stricter sense than that part of it is modelled on the debate of the Fallen Angels seem to exhibit something of the common inability (which, however, is strange in Mr Colvin) to separate matter and form. Whether the matter be Miltonic or not is a question with which I have nothing to do, but the form of *Hyperion* is almost always *calqué* upon Milton, and occasionally, though *not* always, produces a copy as magnificent as a copy can be. The first three lines Milton might have written, then the tracer's hand slips a little, and the sequence of hit-or-miss continues throughout. It might be contended that this blending of styles is itself of the highest interest, and certainly if, as Mr Arnold was pleased to say, it is "not a success," one might be very fairly content with a *Corpus Poeticum* full of such non-successes. But both forms are rather too full of that "student" character which we are mainly developing in Keats.

*The Eve of  
St Agnes* and  
the Spenserian

The natural man, however, very excusably shares that preference of achievement over tentative, which the maxim rather invidiously limits to an inchoate stage and a special development of humanity. And what we have left to mention of Keats's prosodic work is all achievement, and achievement right marvellous. *The Eve of St Agnes* is almost faultless both in diction and metre. It is closer to the actual Spenserian norm—of which, with *Adonais* and the induction to the *Lotos-Eaters*, it makes the First Three followings—than Shelley's great poem, and yet it has almost as much idiosyncrasy as the Spenserian will brook. If any one will give himself the delight of reading again that great picture-stanza<sup>1</sup>—where

<sup>1</sup> Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,  
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon,  
Rose-bloom fell on her hands together prest,  
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,  
And on her hair a glory like a saint

the late Professor Bain thought there was "little attempt at giving a picture," and on which some of the ineffables have debated whether moonlight can carry colour,—he will see how perfectly Keats has got the motion of the *novena*-pause—given, withheld, varied, so as to score the symphony. And he may compare it, if he likes, with stanza xxxii, where a more cumulative effect is aimed at and achieved by frequent end-stops. There is never a stanza, and hardly a line, wrong or insignificant in movement throughout the whole piece.

This at last complete mastery of stanza shows itself no less in the famous "Odes,"<sup>1</sup> especially in the consummate "Nightingale" and "Grecian Urn." Beautiful things though there be in "Psyche," I cannot think it successful metrically, the author having allowed himself to be tempted to his besetting sin of prolixity by a very loose and wandering arrangement of stanza. But "Autumn" recovers the elict grace of the two opening pieces, and Keats's "sevens," always good, are better than ever in "Fancy" and its fellows.

Still, the quintessence of pure prosody in Keats is perhaps to be found in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, which the late Mr. Palgrave thought "an imitative ballad,"<sup>2</sup> where the poet was "not quite himself," and in that "Eve of St. Mark," which for some incomprehensible reason he did not give in his "Golden Treasury" edition at all. The marvellous composition, which has such interesting variants, and respecting which Keats wrote with such a

The various  
ode stanzas

*La Belle Dame  
sans Merci*  
and "The Eve  
of St. Mark"

She seemed a splendid angel, newly drest,  
Save wings, for heaven — Porphyro grew fume —  
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint

To stop the burk of Momus Cerberus with appropriate earth, it may be observed that "amethyst" takes the rhyme benefit of "ever" and "river," "given" and "heaven," etc., these *e* and *i* sounds approaching close enough to be interchanged.

<sup>1</sup> It should hardly be necessary to dwell on the position of these in the long sequence of elaborate stanza creations which begins with Spenser's *Prothalamion* and *Epythalamion*.

<sup>2</sup> I do wish he had been good enough to tell us what Keats imitated here. I thought I knew something of English poetry, and not a little of English ballad and romance, but where the original of *La Belle Dame sans Merci* is, except in heaven, I do not know.

delightful absence of posing and posturing, might serve, like one or two other things cited previously in this history, as a special and for the time exclusively sufficient text of a sermon on what prosody can do. To say that it is *all* prosody would, of course, be the idlest of professional vanities. But the loss in poetic effect which would be effected by extension of the fourth line from two feet to the usual three would be too horrible to think of, if it were not for the compensating joy of knowing that it has not been experienced, and the perfection of this miraculous monometer would be less if the trisyllabic variations

And her eyes | were wild  
and the twice-repeated

On the cold | hillside

were regularised. There is much else for prosody in it—the slow dream-motion of the whole, for instance—but it is perhaps better to dwell, in such a crucial instance, on clear and indisputable certainties. *La Belle Dame sans Merci* is one of the great poems of the world—it would not be one of them if the cleverest poem-mender in that world put an additional foot, however exquisitely selected, in its fourth lines. Try, and see.

In a certain sense, however, though in a certain sense only, "The Eve of St Mark" is of even more prosodic importance than *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. The magic of this latter is, to a great extent, actually due to the use of a certain prosodic device. But it is not exactly every poet who could produce the effect by the application of the means—there is no *general secret taught*. In "The Eve of St Mark," on the other hand, Keats has achieved, and has left for others to use—in one instance already with wonderful success—what is practically a new variety of almost the oldest and one of the most commonly practised of English metres, the regular octosyllabic couplet, only sometimes cut down to sevens, not (or very seldom) equivalenced trisyllabically, and daring, but conquering, the old danger of mellifluous monotony. This is not the

octosyllable of Wither, or of Milton, or of Dyer, it is, of course, not the octosyllable of Butler, or of Prior, or of Swift. It is still less that of Coleridge and Scott and Byron. It is most like the early seventeenth-century examples, but is crossed, to a wonderful effect of excellence, with something that comes from the fourteenth—from the few very best examples of Gower and the rather more numerous, but not quite similarly applied, examples of Chaucer. It would be extremely interesting to know whether Keats had read that great Medea passage<sup>1</sup> which shoots so far above the insignificant amenity of the average *Confessio* prosody. Any one who looks at the lines quoted below<sup>2</sup> will see at once how not merely the simple but very powerful device of stopping the couplet heavily in the middle or at the end of its first line, but the much more cunning one of weighting the word-values variously, is employed. The octosyllable is so short that you cannot do much with actual pause, in fact it is much better neglected. But you can do a very great deal by fingering the middles, and overlapping as well as sharply stopping the ends. All this Keats showed in miniature by these few lines, and half a century later his indication

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* 1 141

<sup>2</sup> Upon a Sabbath day it fell;  
Twice holy was the Sabbath bell,  
That called the folk to evening-prayer,  
The city streets were clean and fair  
From wholesome drench of April rains,  
And on the western window-panes  
The chilly sunset faintly told  
Of unmaturoed green valleys cold,  
Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,  
Of rivers new with spring-tide sedge,  
Of primroses by sheltered rills,  
And daisies on the aguish hills  
Twice holy was the Sabbath bell  
The silent streets were crowded well  
With staid and pious companies,  
Warm from their fire-side oratories,  
And moving, with demurest air,  
To even-song and vesper prayer  
Each arched porch, and entry low,  
Was filled with patient folk and slow,  
With whispers hush, and shuffling feet,  
While played the organ loud and sweet

was put in delightful practice by the author of "The Ring given to Venus" and "The Land East of the Sun"<sup>1</sup>

The "Intermediates"

In the group which has been called "the Intermediates"—who were born between Keats and Tennyson, and who exhibited the comparatively abundant second crop of not quite first-rate poetry to be expected in the circumstances—the spread of prosodic craftsmanship, and the tendency to exercise it in as varied a fashion as possible, are distinctly present. The weaker of them, such as Haynes Bayly and "L E L," exhibit the slipshod facility derived from Moore and Monk Lewis, and pass it on, rather disastrously, to Mrs Browning. The strongest of them, such as Beddoes, Darley, and Hood, take to the greater modes and transmit the following of these to their own betters, Tennyson himself and Robert Browning, while a special "scholarly" subdivision is illustrated by Picaud and Macaulay. We must not say much of any of these, but Beddoes and Picaud are very remarkable prosodically, and hardly one of the seven, even the weakest—these being, as usual, the most popular,—could be missed in one sense, without being missed in the other, from a history of English prosody.

'L E L'

The engaging and unfortunate lady<sup>2</sup> who lent "Miss Bunion" her titles and her poetic tone, but did not in the least resemble her in person, was something of a *poetris pua* no doubt, but she chattered in rather melodious verse, and, in particular, seldom or never committed the appalling rhymes which Mrs Browning permitted herself, and even tried to defend. Her Muse is not exactly a slattern, but she is rather carelessly dressed. There is, for instance, a very lazy and stingy allowance of rhyme in such a stanza as

<sup>1</sup> For some general remarks on the prosodies of Keats and Shelley and then contrast, *see inf* Interchapter ix.

<sup>2</sup> The late Sir M. E. Grant-Duff once, in conversation, fell good-naturedly foul of me for being unjust to Mrs Hemans and perhaps somebody may think the injustice repeated, in the way of omission, here. She is possibly a better poetess than Miss Landon, but part of her merit is a considerable prosodic *regularity*, which leaves little to be said. She can be praised, but must be left out in the cold of a note.

I have gone east, I have gone west  
 To seek for what I cannot find,  
 A heart at peace with its own thought,  
 A quiet and contented mind,

especially when—to any one emulating the steering of Lord Bateman, but scorning the rhyme-barrenness of his chronicler—"breast" suggests itself most conveniently in such a context. And she will write long narrative or semi-narrative poems with these meagre trimmings. The couplets of the *Golden Violet* are not much enjambed—which is probably due to the fact that her model was Byron, not Hunt or Keats, rather than to any preference for the succinct form. But she must have read her proofs with singular inattention, for in one rather well-modulated poem<sup>1</sup>—

He sleeps—the night wind o'er the battle-field  
 Is gently sighing—  
 Gently, although each faint breeze bear away  
 Life from the dying,

the second line once, and once only, telescopes itself out by a whole foot

Another field | before him

The author of "I'd be a butterfly," "O no! we never mention her," "She wore a wreath of roses," and other poor things that have passed from the garland to the rubbish heap, mixed his Moore-and-water not unpleasantly, or (to take the round of the senses still further) adjusted the tink-a-tink of his instrument regularly enough. But he could sometimes permit himself a rhyme more absurd, though less excruciating, than the worst of Mrs Browning's own. In a rather pretty piece, for instance, of which the refrain is

You'll love me, won't you?

he mates this (after describing "demonstrations") with

Did that *affront* you?

<sup>1</sup> It will be observed that here again is the singular stinginess of rhyme. I believe it not extravagant to suggest that this is *partly* due to that sickness of the rhymed couplet which we find everywhere felt, and sometimes expressed, at this time.

Now "*wunt* you" does not, somehow or other, seem to suit kisses and roses and butterflies and marble halls and anguish-causing mothers and the rest of it<sup>1</sup>

But to understand the popularity of such work as Miss Landon's and Mr Bayly's on the prosodic side, we must still remember the recent—almost actual—domination of couplet, and the monotony even of lyric measures in the eighteenth century. Here was at least an attempt at a *karole*, at the flash of the tinsel slipper, and the revel of the varied line

Macaulay The inclusion of Macaulay in such a history as this will only surprise second-hand echoers of the not very wise depreciation of the *Lays* made by Mr Matthew Arnold, and perhaps one or two others, at first-hand. But even some persons of better taste and instruction may not, unless they have paid special attention to the subject, have fully estimated his prosodic importance.

This is not best shown in the best thing that he ever did, the famous and exquisite "Jacobite's Epitaph"—one of the pieces that, out of Landon, most perfectly reproduce, in modern English, the classical limpidity and chastity which Mr Arnold himself—that angelic but ineffectual rebel to Romanticism—never could attain. The poetry is here well served by the prosody, but nothing more. Even in this, however, as well as in the fine, though less fine, "Lines Written in August," there emerges the note which is more strongly heard in the *Lays* themselves—a note which is one of the characteristics of the prosody of the century, and which, considering Macaulay's birth-date, must be allowed very early appearance in him. It is that of scholarly, of literary, of intelligent, conscious, and, to a great degree, successful following of this and that example in older English verse. His chief forerunners in this, and that not by much, had been Hartley Coleridge and Lockhart,<sup>2</sup> again putting

<sup>1</sup> I am of course aware that some modern phoneticians think it *ought* to be "*wunt*."

<sup>2</sup> These names are instances of the application of a self-denying ordinance which must henceforth pinch me. I would much rather talk about them than about "L. E. L." and Haynes Bayly, but they are not so much "for me."

Landor aside, but neither had "standardised" anything in quite the same fashion as that wherein the *Lays* standardise the adaptation of the common measure, which, on the pattern of the ballads and of Spenser's *February*, the first Romantic school from Chatterton to Byron had endeavoured. In *The Armada* he applied this same process of standardisation to the *unbroken* eight-and-six—the fourteener—and with equal success. That there is standardised and scholastic quality about it, that it bears much the same relation to its originals as very perfect Etonian hexameters or elegiacs bear to Virgil or to Propertius, may be admitted, but this does not diminish the interest.

And that interest is much increased by another, and at first sight almost contradictory, phenomenon which shows itself in his second best and most original thing, "The Last Buccaneer"<sup>1</sup>. He begins it with a sort of prelude

"The Last  
Buccaneer"

Hartley's sonnets are excellent, but not excellently remarkable as prosody. Lockhart's chief prosodic triumph is the extraordinarily beautiful "Wandering Knight's Song" of the *Spanish Ballads*, perhaps his next, "Captain Piton's Lament"—an unusual adaptation of the trochee to playful pathetic purposes. So also I must only glance at J. H. Reynolds, that curious link between Keats and Hood in matters prosodic and other, especially (as regards prosody) in the new Pindaric.

<sup>1</sup> This striking piece may be cited and analysed at some length, especially as I have known persons, well acquainted with the *Essays* and the *Lays*, to whom it was quite strange. It opens

The winds were yelling, the waves were swelling,  
The sky was black and drear,  
When the crew with eyes of flame, etc

The other stanza cited above begins

To-night there shall be heard on the rocks of Cape de Verde  
A loud crash and a louder roar

And there is a fine one before it

From a shore no search hath found, from a gulf no line can sound,  
Without rudder or needle we steer,  
Above, below, our bark, dies the seafowl and the shark  
As we fly by the last Buccaneer

Now it will be noticed that you can scan *some* of the longer lines (which present, anapaestically or iambically taken, hypermetrical syllables) trochaically in pairs

From a | shore no | search has | found,  
From a | gulf no | line can | sound

But not all. "Above, below," etc., has a syllable too little, and another not yet quoted—



or overture of curiously truncated character for the first couplet of his first stanza, but immediately opens this out, and establishes the rhythm which he means to use throughout. Now this rhythm, when taken to pieces and arranged—as in regularity it should be—as a six-line stanza instead of a four-lined one, is quite simple, and very like what possibly suggested it, “The Battle of the Baltic.” That is to say, it is regular anapaestic threes, usually allowed to run out to the full in lines two, four, and six, usually equivalenced back to iambs in one, three, and five.

But, as Macaulay has chosen to print it, it contains a suggestion which has been frequently echoed since in poetry both serious and comic, and has, I think, led some astray. I said long ago that I see no necessity in English poetry for four-syllable feet, or even for the heavier trisyllables—those in which there is more than one long, or where the long is in the middle. To this principle I adhere, and it was stated with full knowledge of the facts which will be indicated here and in some other cases. These facts may be classed either as suggestions of “syzygy,”—of coupling two feet into a measure, or on the other hand, as allowing tetrasyllables. Thus, though I do not need, I should not utterly bar the tetrasyllabic scansion of such a couplet as

When the crew with eyes of flame brought the ship without a name  
 Alongside the last Buccaneer,  
 or as

And to-morrow shall the deep with a heavy morning sweep  
 The corpses and wreck to the shore,

with two pæons or ionics *a minore* in the first lines, and

And Severn's towering mast securely now flies fast,  
 has *two* too little. Only a very loose anapaestic norm, or the occasional tetrasyllables above suggested, will fit the whole. I have not much doubt that, besides Campbell, Macaulay had Scott (*v. sup.* p. 81, note on “The Eve of St John”) in his mind. “The Battle of Naseby” is of the same general stamp, but more *regularised*. It is perhaps best to say of the “Buccaneer” itself that it eddies between trochaic and anapaestic rhythm. On mere accentual scansion it becomes simply a waltz.

two amphibrachs in the second<sup>1</sup> I must, however, point out that these scansion, however much they may suggest themselves now and then, will not suit all lines, and that the plain anapaest and iamb will, as will also a shift from trochee to iamb

These occasional syzygies,<sup>2</sup> however, as a kind of extra equivalence, *may* suggest themselves not infrequently to some ears. In songs set to music there is no doubt of them, as, for instance—an instance which I trust will not be taken as “flippant,”—in the notorious case of “Vikings and his Dinah,” where the third pæon base is unmistakable, and its shutting up, for emphasis and solemnity, into something very like *molossæ* is most interesting —

Now as Dinah | vos a valking | in the garding | vun day  
Her papa he | came to hei | and thus he | did say

But this is music, not prosody. And I am not sure that the temptation to scan the great legend of The Bogle in four-thrice time—

He accompa[n]ied each blow | with a Ha<sup>1</sup> or | with a Ho |  
And he always | cleft his foe |  
To the waist, |

as well as those poems of Mrs. Browning's which may be not quite unconnected with that glorious and mysterious<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When the crew with | eyes of flame || brought the ship with|out a name  
Along side | the last Buc|caner,

the dotted scansions being, as before, alternative. The “plun anapaest and iamb” would give

When the crew | with eyes | of flame || brought the ship | without | a name  
Along|side the last | Buccaneer|

<sup>2</sup> The word has been rather abused lately, but *abusus non tollit*, etc. It has a good old prosodic warranty in this sense.

<sup>3</sup> I have sought in vain, from persons intimately acquainted with the history of the city of Bulle Jarvic, information as to the possible origin of this, the greatest work existing in connection with the Regius Professorship of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh, and one which will occupy us again. But nobody, not even Sir Theodore Martin, seemed to know who George of Corbals was, or the redoubtable Neish, or that not unworthy Lancelot, the Bogle himself, or what was the occasion on which, with such suicidal industry,

They [were] working at the mun  
And the gin<sup>1</sup>

ballad, ought not to be resisted—trochaic scansion throughout being far preferable and not at all anomalous. But the subject is a really interesting one, and I should like the present digression on it to be read in company with other past and, if it may be, future references to the subject of foot-composition and distribution.

Praed

The great development of practical versemanship which we are witnessing in these transitionaries is even more illustrated in Macaulay's contemporary and "cross-ratter"<sup>1</sup> at Trinity, Winthrop Mackworth Praed, who is, indeed, one of the chief of the lesser lights of English prosody. That metrical conscience and competence which, as we have seen, and have also had to argue, is often, as far as the *conscious* conscience is concerned, absent even in very great poets—which had come in with certainly not very great ones, like Monk Lewis—exhibits itself in him throughout. He never goes wrong by accident or incompetence. The longer but less important poems of his youth, *Lullian*, *Gog*, etc., owe of course a good deal to Southey and others, but they anticipate Barham in the perfect ease and correctness with which they "take the *flure*" in the most complicated horn-pipes and double-shuffles of measure. In the ever-to-be-famous "Red Fisherman" this accomplishment becomes consummate. It was only ten years since *Christabel* had been published, though thirty since it had been written, and here is a practical "farthest" in one particular direction of the *Christabel* lesson.

There are, however, other places besides this where the almost monotonous competence turns to something even better. A piece that would not have been a wonder in technical execution thirty years earlier is the exception in Praed. He sets his own handicap so high in this way that one becomes unconscionable in one's demands on him. He can meet them, however. There is very remarkable

<sup>1</sup> I was once rebuked by a most respectable connection of Praed's for mentioning the word "rat" in connection with him. As he ratted to my own side there certainly could be no offence meant, I wish we had ship loads like him. And the fact was recognised by himself in the jocular title "Mr Craze Rattee."

fingering in "Time's Song,"<sup>1</sup> where it is to be noted that, despite the extremely strong middle pause rhythmically, the lines are *not* intended to be divided, and the sense sometimes imperatively bars such division. "Arminius" challenges the *Lays* at their own favourite weapon of a peculiar kind of common measure, and, I think, beats them, though, of course, only over a short trial-course. And "Sir Nicholas," renews the challenge with perhaps more dubious success. I should like it to be better than "Naseby," but I do not think it is. "The Vicar" and "Josephine" and "Twenty-Eight and Twenty-Nine" are all prosodically irreproachable, and "Sleep, Mr Speaker," has always, as often as I have read it, nearly made me cry "It is so beautiful"—in the modulation of its graceful half-doggerelised lilt, and the absolutely ideal harmony of its form and its matter.<sup>2</sup> But of course the triumph of Praed's prosody is elsewhere—elsewhere even than in the "Red Fisherman" itself—in the marvelously transformed anapaestic three-foot with redundancy in the odd lines, which he selected and perfected for the

<sup>1</sup> O'er the level plains, where mountains greet me as I go,  
O'er the desert waste, where fountains at my bidding flow,  
On the boundless beam by day, on the cloud by night,  
I am riding hence away—who will chain my flight?

War his weary watch was keeping,—I have crushed his spear,  
Grief within her bower was weeping,—I have dried her tear,  
Pleasure caught a minute's hold,—then I hurried by,  
Leaving all her banquet cold, and her goblet dry

The prosodic secret here, if I am not mistaken, is the "extra double magnifying power" of the lengthening emphasis on the initial syllables—mostly monosyllables—of the line-halves

<sup>2</sup> Sleep, Mr Speaker, it's surely fair  
If you don't in your bed, that you should in your chair  
Longer and longer still they grow,  
Toiy and Radeal, Aye and No,  
Talking by night, and talking by day,—  
Sleep, Mr Speaker, sleep, sleep while you may!

Sleep, Mr Speaker, sweet to men  
Is the sleep that comes but now and then,  
Sweet to the sorrowful, sweet to the ill,  
Sweet to the children that work in the mill,  
You have more need of sleep than they,—  
Sleep, Mr Speaker, sleep, sleep while you may!

"Letter of Advice" and the "Fourteenth of February," for the "Good Night to the Season" and "Our Ball" We have seen how the jingly and rickety original—*without* redundance—of this glorious and pyramidal metre was used by Shenstone and Cowper, how Gay, and Chesterfield, and Lady Mary used the real thing for half-doggerel, how Byron, in some odd moment of inspiration, or lucky one of windfall, effected the one thing needful<sup>1</sup> But if Harrow fished the murex up, it was Eton that discovered the full virtue of the dye, by the art of Praed and of Mr Swinburne

The "Praed  
metre"

In fact there is hardly a more remarkable example than this metre<sup>2</sup> (save perhaps *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and one or two more) of that power and reality of purely prosodic form, at which some people sneer The simple and, as they call it, mechanical addition of an odd syllable to two lines in four absolutely alters its whole character, gives it new powers, opens up to it new realms of possible sovereignty Of the older and imperfect mode it would be difficult to find a piece which *ought* to have been better than Cowper's "Alexander Selkirk" Cowper was not only a poet, but, as has been shown in its place, a poet of no small specially prosodic power, Wordsworth's criticism on the diction of this piece is one of Wordsworth's most uncritical utterances, and the subject, from Cowper's point of view, gave ample opportunities Yet the unbroken "rumtity, tumtity, tum" is all but intolerable Now try, with the bare symbols just indicated, the lengthened form—

With a rum|tity tum|tity tum|ty—  
With a rum|tity tum|tity tum,

and presto! the whole thing is changed The little recoil or interval—take it as you will—gives the first

<sup>1</sup> It would be a curious but not an unexampled instance of the irony of the world if he really got it unconsciously from the "Azrael" couplet of *Thalaba*, given above at p. 53, which, though rhymeless and uncompleted, has the germ It was already famous, and Byron's contempt of Southey as a poet was, like not a few other people's, much more affected than real

<sup>2</sup> "The Praed metre" it may surely be called with greater justice than even "the Burns metre"

- line something to "kick against," to give itself force and sting—a something which thrills back to its very beginning and surges throughout. The second line acquires from the first quite a different effect. Instead of a jejune and jingling repetition it has a varied and concentrated motion which whets the ear again for the new form of line three. The despairing monotony of the Shenstone-Cowper form exchanges itself for a variety

Like the wave,

and whereas under the old arrangement serious and even passionate situations grew trumpery, in the new even burlesque and mere fun acquire passion and poetry.

The gain in variety, in suppleness, in substitution of clangour for clatter, is shown in all the examples,<sup>1</sup> the least remarkable being "Tales out of School", and the pathetic effect, perhaps, best in "Our Ball". But for the real exaltation of the metre—for its promotion to an altogether "higher *spear*," as Mrs. Clinker would say—we must, of course, go to the "Letter of Advice". How one would like to have met Miss Medora Trevilian at Padua or elsewhere! and how small she makes all the other poetesses of 1828 look beside her! Praed himself, like a gentleman and a good fellow, has spoken politely of

<sup>1</sup> Two, specially referred to above, must suffice

Remember the thrilling romances  
We read on the bank in the glen,  
Remember the suitors our fancies  
Would picture for both of us then  
They wore the red cross on their shoulder,  
They had vanquished and pardoned their foe—  
Sweet friend, are you wiser or colder?  
My own Araminta, say "No!"

They tell me you're shadowed with harel  
They tell me you're loved by a Blue  
They tell me you're sadly immoral—  
Dear Clarence *that* cannot be true!  
But to me you are still what I found you,  
Before you grew clever and tall,  
And you'll think of the spell that once bound you,  
And you'll come—won't you come?—to our Ball!

Observe that on the "accentual" system there is *no* difference between this and the Shenstone-Cowper jingle

"L E L," and we have endeavoured to tread in his steps ,  
but when did "L E L" write anything like

Remember the thrilling romances,

or

He must walk, like a god of old story  
Come down from the home of his rest

I have known hypercritical persons who objected to

Like music his soft | *speech must flow*, |

but they evidently did not see that "speech must flow" is "clogged with consonants," by that artful Medora, on purpose to indicate its own freedom from babble and gabble.

Seriously, the opportunities of *inflexion*—of rise and fall—which this metre, thus improved, possesses, are miraculous. Praed himself had no use for them all, or was not equal to them as yet, and we may hope for them to be subject of another discourse in reference to things that even Medora could not have written—things in which the magic of the dying fall is to be added to that of the throbbing rise, as

Night sinks on the sea

Hood.

Some not very grave questions in the usually idle department of plagiarism-ferreting have been raised about the relations of Praed and Hood in the selection and use of the half-metrical, half-verbal trick of repeated phrase, as in

The ice of her ladyship's manners,  
The ice of his lordship's champagne,

and other things, but they need not trouble us. People who really care for poetry have long made up their minds that the frail, but far from feeble, body of Thomas Hood contained within it not merely a faculty of infinite jest, but a really poetic soul. It is certainly not from the prosodic side that any demur will be made to this. The more purely comic poems are not marred, but put somewhat out of our range, by the fact that, while they exhibit that increased facility of adapting comic or farcical sound

to sense which necessarily forms part of the general diffusion of prosodic aptitude, they are mostly, if not intentionally, doggerel verse of a kind that, like some of Praed's own efforts and more of others, will be best studied once for all under its "prior," Barham

With the so-called "serious" poems, even if we relieve them of the serio- or tragi-comic, such as "Miss Kilmansegg," it is different. They do not provide us with any such special and almost original accomplishment as the metre of the "Letter of Advice," but the command of "divers tones" is perhaps greater than in Praed. It is also beyond all question more independent, not merely of direct comic "breakdown," but of comic hint—the little trick or inflexion of prosodic voice, as it were, which is rarely though not quite never absent in the author of the "Letter." "Eugene Aram" and "The Elm Tree" are both remarkable for the curious suffusion of the metre with gloom, but their share of it is nothing to that possessed by "The Haunted House"<sup>1</sup>. The manipulation of that measure of great capabilities, but also great dangers, the quatrain of decasyllables, is quite extraordinary. Hood has shortened the last line. We have seen and shall see that, without some liberty of this or of the rhyme kind, the monotony which even Dryden, even Gray,<sup>2</sup> hardly escaped is all but certain. But he has proceeded further in another of these directions by adopting redundancy in the even lines, thus, let it be observed, preparing the shortening of the whole line and extension of the end in the fourth. On the mere specifica-

<sup>1</sup> For instance

Those dreary stairs where, with the sounding stress  
Of ev'ry step, so many echoes blended—  
The mind, with dark misgivings, fear'd to guess  
*How many feet ascended*

There is something in this finely phrased and moulded stanza, and especially in the last line, which makes one remember a great thing of Hugo's, turned differently

Quelqu'un qu'entourent les ombres  
Montera mes marches sombres,  
*Et quelqu'un les descendra*

*Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*, III I

<sup>2</sup> It suited Gray to some extent, of course



tion of it, and before trial, I think I should have augured a perilous tendency to burlesque in this. And I am by no means sure that the *tendency* is not there. But, if so, Hood has availed himself of it to produce that opposite effect which is often within reach of the artist on such occasions. You expect burlesque in a vague way from the form, you find at once the reverse of burlesque in the matter, and the result is an additional grimness, as of a skeleton in a fool's cap and with bauble. The slow and almost heavy march of the unaltered original he has to a great extent kept, he wanted it, and the shuddering arrest of the last line only helps it. All the lines, even when there is no actual stop at their end, are single-moulded here, and there is a sense of oppression—almost of stifling—all through. Continued much longer, the effect would have been intolerable, but, as it is, Hood has made it just the right length. In the second rank—and pretty high in that second—I hardly know a greater piece of craftsmanship.

So, too, though I have never been among the most enthusiastic admirers<sup>1</sup> of the "Bridge" and the "Shirt," it would be almost impossible to adopt prosodic vehicles more appropriate, especially in the first. I cannot help thinking it a pity that he chose to discard the final Alexandrine in "The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies," but the actual measure does not ill suit that beautiful poem, and the continuous anapaests of "Lycus the Centaur" give, I think, one of the longest examples of that metre for narrative that are really good. And such dangerous things as the "Hymn to the Sun" and "Ode to the Moon" are well mated in verse.

But next to "The Haunted House" I think that Hood's power of selecting and modulating metre is best shown by some of those smaller lyrics in which the nine-

His minor  
poems

<sup>1</sup> For instance, though I never was a member of any Browning Society, I think

The three men who did most abhor  
Their life in Paris yesterday

gets the poetic grip better, in the simplicity of its two lines, than all the accumulated appeals of "The Bridge of Sighs."

teenth century was leaving the eighteenth behind (as Dante left lower spheres for higher during his happier journey) and was recovering the paradise of the seventeenth itself. The manipulation of common measure in "The Time of Roses" exemplifies this. Its extreme beauty arises from contrasted arrangement in the three stanzas—the middle one being normal, the first catalectic in both first and third line, and the last daringly limiting catalexis to the final couplet only (Very simple, of course, but, once more, "Go thou and do likewise"<sup>1</sup>) There are fifty or five hundred things in these "Intermediates" which are more or less like "Fair Ines,"<sup>2</sup> which of them can vie with it in the mixture to be carried out of saucy blavery and actual passion conveyed in measure and motion, in stamp and stress,<sup>3</sup> in drawing back and letting forth of the line-length like the slides of a cornet? I should like to dwell on the fine Keatsian couplets

- <sup>1</sup> It was not in the winter  
Our loving lot was cast,  
It was the Time of Roses—  
We pluck'd them as we pass'd I  
  
That churlish season never frown'd  
On curly lovers yet —  
Oh no!—the world was newly crown'd  
With flowers when first we met!  
  
'Twas twilight, and I bade you go,  
But still you held me fast,  
It was the Time of ~~Roses~~—  
We pluck'd them as we pass'd!

Compare this with Haynes Bryly's things—so near and so far!

- <sup>2</sup> O saw ye not fair Ines?  
She's gone into the West,  
To dazzle when the sun is down,  
And rob the world of rest  
She took our daylight with her,  
The smiles that we love best,  
With morning blushes ~~on her~~ cheek  
And pearls ~~upon her~~ breast

<sup>3</sup> I have been reproached by some for being an enemy of stress, or, at least, a belittler of its poetic value. May Apollo forgive them! There is hardly a more powerful instrument in the poet's hand for *occasional* effect, and it does, as I have tried to show elsewhere, yeoman's service in providing him with his more usual material. But to monarchise it, to neglect *unstress*, to make stress the sole and single secret of metre—that is the heresy against which, so far as it is not a pure record of the facts, this book is written.

of the "Sea of Death" fragment, and the melancholy burden of

What can an old man do but die?

and "Autumn," and the spirited "Exile," which, however, wants a little more rhyme (compare the remarks above on "L. E. L."), and the excellently sustained "The Stars are with the Voyager", but there is no room

I fear it is true, whatever moralists and Philistines may say, that no man ever wrote much great poetry unless he either had no other work or courageously neglected it, and perhaps there is no sadder instance of loss on this score than Thomas Hood

Darley and  
Beddoes

No such charitable excuse for the individual, and no such accusation of society, is available in the case of those, if not "great perhapses," certainly great puzzles—Darley and Beddoes<sup>1</sup>. Darley does not seem to have been entirely destitute of private means, though he may have had to supplement them by literary work, but the amount of this latter which he did could hardly have stood in the way of the Muse. As for Beddoes, he is stated to have practised as a physician (although I am one of the most fervent of his admirers, I confess I should not much have liked to be his patient). But it is inconceivable that he should ever have let his practice, and it is not suggested that he ever let anything else, interfere with the wayward self-pleasing for which he seems to have had means enough. So whatever may have impeded their poetic accomplishment it was not "the grindstone." As certainly it was not insusceptibility to harmony of words or want of the power of producing it.

There is, of course, much difference of opinion about the poetic value of both, and especially of Darley. I know one excellently qualified and not unduly whimsical critic and lover of poetry who casts Darley from him,

<sup>1</sup> Mr Ramsay Colles has earned the hearty thanks of lovers of poetry by making the works of both poets easily and cheaply accessible in Messrs Routledge's reissue of the *Muses' Library*. Mr Gosse's earlier labours had indeed put Beddoes out of the ranks of the unattainables, but Darley was scattered over half-a dozen volumes, one or two of them very rare. I wish some one would follow with his prose—there are some fine things in *The Labours of Idleness*.

who will have none of Darley, who would wish (to alter Dorset on his "Bonny Black Bess" slightly)

That [some] Queen, overhearing what [Darley] did say,  
Would send Mr Roper to take [him] away

On the other hand, it is well known that in early days some other good judges preferred Darley to Tennyson, and that Tennyson—himself a *very* good judge, and by no means a specially good-natured or gushing one—thought very highly of this rival, whose rivalry seems now so odd to us. However, I have nothing to do here with Darley's general poetic worth. It is enough for me that, if we were to judge by the prosodic value of bits and scraps of his which could be produced by dozens, he would rank among the magicians, and not far below the craftiest of them.

It is most difficult even to produce any of these pieces without admitting, and tediously discussing, Darley's extraordinary uncertainty of taste, especially in diction, and that absence of self-criticism, of selection, of restraint which may not annoy some people, but which certainly annoys most. Grant it all, waive it all. "Let it pass, let it slide," as was once observed, majestically, in the House of Commons by a member somewhat too good for the breed of his companions. There will remain things unquestionable by any one who can get to the point of seeing them face to face as examples of verse.

I do not merely refer to the almost famous

It is not beauty I demand,

which deceived no less a person than the late Mr Palgrave into thinking it genuine Elizabethan, and inserting it as such in the *Golden Treasury*, or the really famous "I've been roaming," which, pretty as it is, does not seem to me to rank with the things of Hood's in the same kind just quoted. But do look at the verse-quality of the wonderful lines from *Nepenthe* quoted below<sup>1</sup>. Take from

<sup>1</sup> O blest unfabled Incense Tree  
That burns in glorious Araby,  
With red scent chalicing the air,  
Till earth life grow Elysian there!

the same failure of a very great poem the audacious experiments in mono-rhymed stanza,<sup>1</sup> also given Pick out and contrast from the disorderly delights, the wandering revel of rhymes, of *Sylvia*, two such movements as those which are appended<sup>2</sup> Add to these only one

Half buried to her flaming breast  
In this bright tree she makes her nest,  
Hundred sunned Phoenix ! when she must  
Crumble at length to hoary dust !

Her gorgeous deathbed ! her rich pyre,  
Burnt up with aromatic fire !  
Her urn, sight high from spoiler men !  
Her birthplace when self born again !

The mountainless green wilds among,  
Here ends she her unechoing song !  
With amber tears and odorous sighs,  
Mourned by the desert where she dies !

<sup>1</sup> Winds of the West, arise !  
Hesperian balmyest airs, O waft hither those sweet sighs  
To her that breathes them from her own pure skies,  
Dew dropping, mixt with Dawn's engoldened dyes  
O'er my unhappy eyes !  
From primrose bed and willow bank where your moss cradle lies,  
O ! from your rushy bowers to waft hither her sweet sighs —  
Winds of the West, arise !

Over the ocean blown,  
Far-winnowing, let my soul be mingled with her own,  
By sighs responsive to each other known !  
Bird unto bird's twin breast has often flown  
From distant zone to zone  
Why must the Darling of the Morn lament him here alone ?  
Shall not his fleeting spirit be mingled with her own,  
Over the ocean blown !

<sup>2</sup> (a) To see the Elves  
Prepare themselves  
To climb the beams of the slanting moon—  
Or swiftly glide  
In bells to hide  
And press their pillows of scent at noon

(b) Strew ! strew, ye maidens ! strew  
Sweet flowers and fairest !  
Pale rose and pansy blue—  
Lily the rarest—  
Lay, lay her gently down  
On her moss pillow,  
While we our foreheads crown  
With the sad willow

stanza<sup>1</sup> from "The Maiden's Grave," and then say, on proofs which could be easily multiplied, whether this Irishman had not something more than the usual Irish command of facile, slip-the-girth verse?

There is no need of such apologetics in speaking of Beddoes, nor of so large and varied a selection to justify them. He and Darley are of the same class—the class of persons who come near to, or actually reach, great poetry without being great poets, but Beddoes is the higher in the class, and nearer to the still impossible poethood of real greatness. Yet he does it, at least in part, by the same means—the magic of verse—in his case better sustained and more thoroughly brought off. Whereas, for all Darley's familiarity with the Elizabethans, *Thomas à Becket* and *Ethelstan* are things which all but a very few people may be affectionately, but earnestly, entreated not to read—things where the writer carries on a hopeless Laocoon fight with the intricacies of his models—*The Fool's Tragedy* and *The Bride's Tragedy* and *The Second Brother* and the Fragments are only marred by that excess of redundancy to which the early imitators took by a natural recoil from eighteenth-century practice, and of which some folk seem even now not to perceive the dangers. There is hardly anything of Beddoes' which would not repay prosodic examination—the curious continuous sixains (rhymed *abbecca*, but having the appearance of blank verse accidentally tipped with irregular rhyme), the dixains (three couplets and an alternate quatrain), of *Rudolph*, the irregular octaves (*aabbcdcd*) of *Albert and Emily*. But his lyrics are the point.

The songs in *Death's Jest Book*, though always very pretty and sometimes beautiful, supply only one perfect thing, and elsewhere are not much above Darley's own

<sup>1</sup> Fresh is my mossy bed,  
The frequent pity of the rock falls here,  
A sweet, wild, silent tear<sup>1</sup>  
I have heard  
Sometimes a wild and melancholy bird  
Warble at my grave-head

pitch<sup>1</sup> But this *is* perfect, and when we come to what should be the universally known first stanza of "Dream-Pedlary"<sup>2</sup> what words can possibly do justice to its movement and music? what prosody of the very greatest that we have cited or referred to, in this voyage through the realms of gold, can be held superior to it? The selection of stanza, the arrangement of the rhymes, the framing of single lines to suit their sense, the utter inevitableness of the diction—how shall we acknowledge them rightly? There is nothing for it but to borrow those great and final words for which, even if Hazlitt's many sins were more than, they are and his many virtues fewer, he should be canonised as a critic "It is something worth living for to write, or even read, such poetry as this, or to know that it has been written" And, once more, beyond all question, though not beyond all difference in estimate of proportion, the prosody is a mighty part of this inestimable poetry

One might quote many more, but this is not an anthology, and after the pair just quoted it is not necessary Not even in Shelley before, or in Tennyson after, is there anything more significant of the recovered mastery of prosodic music—of the unlocking of the forgotten treasury where the harps and horns of Elfland had hung so long unused

<sup>1</sup> If thou wilt ease thine heart  
Of love and all its smart,  
Then sleep, dear, sleep,  
And not a sorrow  
Hang any tear on your eyelashes,  
Lie still and deep,  
Sad soul, until the sea-wave washes  
The rim o' the sun to-morrow  
In eastern sky

<sup>2</sup> If there were dreams to sell  
What would you buy?  
Some cost a passing bell,  
Some a light sigh—  
That shakes from Life's fresh crown  
Only a rose-leaf down  
If there were dreams to sell,  
Merry and sad to tell,  
And the crier rang his bell,  
What would you buy?

For some reason (I think a real one) he cut the penultimate triplet to a couplet in the other stanzas

## CHAPTER IV

### PROSODISTS BEFORE GUEST

Subjects of the chapter—Return to Cowper—As prosodic critic—  
Sayers again—The grammaticasters, Walker and Murray—  
Odell—Thelwall—Roe—Warner—Herbert—Gregory—Criti-  
cisms on Southey's hexameters, the *Edinburgh Review*—Till-  
brook—Crowe—Some others—Payne Knight—Carey—Frere  
and Blundell

IN the last volume we pursued the survey of "preceptist" Subjects of the  
chapter prosody till very nearly the close of the eighteenth century Return to  
Cowper. In the present chapter we take it up again with especial reference to those writers who did *not* accompany precept and theory with practice, or whose practice (as in the case of Crowe and one or two more) was not very important. Of those who both preached and practised, the subjects of the first chapter of this book yield us little, and those of the second and third, not very much, while what they give (except Southey's hexameter practice and theory, which is reserved for separate treatment) has been, for the most part, taken with their poetry. The glances of Macpherson and of Blake are interesting, if only because they are indicative of the inevitable dissatisfaction with the prosody of eighteenth-century verse. But there is a writer—later by far than Macpherson, contemporary in work though not in years with Blake—to whom we must return, because his prosodic remarks "throw forward," because he is not as Fogg or Nares, but—though himself not half knowing it—a herald of things unimagined by them.

It may have surprised some readers that Cowper, of As prosodic  
critic whose practice in prosody not a little was said in the last



volume, did not figure there as a prosodist. The reason for this has just been given—that the prosodic remarks in his letters are very late, and distinctly belong to this present chapter, not merely by their date, but (which is much more important) by their character. Nowhere is the anti-Pope movement—the revolt against the couplet—more openly proclaimed, in fact almost the whole of them bear directly on the question of the superiority of blank verse to rhyme as a medium for the translation of Homer, and (indirectly) on the characteristics of blank verse itself.

It is, however, pretty clear that Cowper had never thought the question thoroughly out, that he had not even got so far as to ask himself what the general characteristics of English prosody were. In this, as in so many other cases, we must, of course, remember the strange gap in his intellectual life, and that he was a man of 1730 unnaturally yoked as a poet with men of 1750 or 1760—a sort of poetical Rip van Winkle. In one of his earliest pieces of criticism—the strictures on Johnson's *Lives* of Pope and Prior (to Unwin, Jan 5, 1782)—except a glance at Pope's "mechanical verse" which duplicates his own metrical criticism, there is nothing prosodic. Nearly three years later (to Newton, Dec 11, 1784) he asserts that "blank verse is susceptible of a much greater diversification of manner than verse in rhyme"—flatters himself that *he* has "avoided sameness," but does not say how. To Bagot (Aug 31, 1786) he extols the "divine harmony" of Milton, attributes this to his "elisions," but admits that these are "discord and dissonance" to "modern ears" because they "lengthen the line beyond its due limits"<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, against his own judgment, he does not himself "elide" much, but "shifts pause and cadence perpetually". To the same, five years later (Jan 4, 1791), he denies Johnson's (?) remark that "the syllables of our language are neither long nor short", rather rashly

<sup>1</sup> The singular fate which besets those who use the word "elision" in English grips Cowper here. How can *elisions* possibly *lengthen* a line? But to him, as to all of them, these were evidently elisions and not elisions.

asserting that "*every* syllable is distinguishably and clearly *either* long or short," and, less rashly, that "without attention to quantity good verse cannot possibly be written", that "the ignorance of this matter is one reason why we see so much that is good for nothing," and that "the movement of a verse is always either shuffling or graceful according to our management in this particular". In two other letters to the same a few weeks later, he comments on Johnson's dislike to "blanks", and the curious undated correspondence with Thurlow is mainly occupied with the "blank *v* rhyme" question—the Chancellor saying some sensible though general things. Also there is the unlucky, though not surprising, judgment of Chapman (to Park, July 15, 1793), which includes the phrase, "his information was not much better than his verse".

Now what strikes me as most remarkable in all this is that Cowper, while laying the greatest stress on quantity, appears to make hardly an allusion to what seems to me inseparable from quantity—scansion by *feet*. And his mentions of "elisions" are rather puzzling. He says that other people thought they made Milton's lines too long—which would seem to imply that other people did not think them elisions *at all*. And, much as he admires, he will not imitate them. So also, while vindicating his use of varied cadence, he abstains in the most curious fashion from *speifying* pauses, stopped or enjambed endings—indeed anything in the way of technical prosodie minutiae. That he should have read little on the subject is not surprising, for after his breakdown his access to books was very small. But that a man with his evident interest in the matter, his intense devotion to Milton, his practice and skill in actual verse-making, and a sound Westminster education at the back of it all, should not have advanced, even a little, beyond vague general notions of "harmony" and the like is really a puzzle. In one place he objects (as he had a perfect right to do) to Thomson's "numbers" as "sometimes not well harmonised", but he gives us no particulars as to the points in which

this lack of harmony (as it seemed to him) consisted. Perhaps we could hardly have a better instance of a fact often insisted on in these pages—that a poet is by no means necessarily a prosodic theorist, that it is possible for him to be a very cunning verse-smith, and yet to know no more about the rationale of his processes than a bee does when it adjusts the angles of its comb-cells. But perhaps it tells us also something more—that the whole subject, was as yet a subject rather of ignorance than of knowledge, and that Apollo winked at this ignorance.

One other piece of information is of a more definite kind, and this falls in with the general theme of the first chapter of this book—the impatience, the weariness, the disgust, with the still reigning couplet, and the rather blind but very natural notion that rhymelessness was the only cure.

Sayers again

This notion, as we have seen, worked at the same time, but in a more revolutionary manner, on Frank Sayers, and produced his, at first sight, disappointing disquisition on "English Metre"<sup>1</sup>. Yet though this is little more than incomplete and almost uncommented retrospect, disappointment, after all, is not perhaps the word, for there is, at any rate, that "exquisition of the old mother"—that study of the real *corpus* of the subject—which is the one thing needful, and which contrasts so remarkably with the endless chatter about accent and quantity, and the preposterous "bar"-scansion of the musicalists. And though it is called a "disquisition," it is clear that this piece of Sayers's is more in the nature of a note of *pièces*, of "documents in the case," than anything else.

The grammaticasters,  
Walker and  
Murray

Those two curious dictators of English grammar and English vocabulary at the end of the eighteenth century—John Walker and Lindley Murray—than whom surely no others ever competed for dictatorship with so little qualification, or attained it with so little resistance for so long a time—had to deal with prosody, of course. But their attitudes to it, and the values of their remarks on it, are very different. It would not be easy to find a better

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* p 39

example of presumptuous ignorance and folly than these words of the author of the *Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) After modestly suggesting that everything previously written on the subject should be cast into the fire, he remarks that it is really so simple that very little need be written "Almost all that the subject requires" is to say that we have verse of such and such a number of syllables to the standard line, that the rhythm is disyllabic or trisyllabic, that the rhythmical *ictus* does or does not begin with the first and fall on the last, that lines are allowed, within certain limits, to deviate from standard, but beyond that they become prose, and that "*the clauses in the line, relatively to clauses in their own or other lines, become harmonious by the proportions they suggest*" It is about all that *this* requires, to say that part of it is doubtfully true, most of it utterly inadequate, and the last clause either mere gibberish, or in need of a not inconsiderable treatise of explanation In fact the passage suggests a possible origin for that mysterious use of the author's name (to indicate contemptuous reception of a statement) which has never been satisfactorily accounted for hitherto

With Lindley Murray (*English Grammar*, 1795), it is, I have said, different Neither here nor elsewhere can he be called a scholar, and his introductory concession regarding poetry in general, that "When this lively mode of exhibiting nature and sentiment is *perfectly chaste*, it is often found to be highly interesting and instructive," is exquisitely ludicrous "Accent" and "unaccent" have too much of their way with him, his doctrine that "short" *cum* pause = "long" is, I know, anathema to some good people, he tends generally to the *elocutory*, and his individual scansion is risky, though I rather wonder at my friend, Mr Omond, who could mildly expostulate with the atrocities of Steele, but finds Lindley's "appalling" Yet in spite of all this there is something about Murray His doctrine that "We have all that the ancients had, and *something they had not*," is uncommonly near the truth, though I dare say he did not know how

true it was For the fact of the matter is that we have the full quantitative scansion by feet, which is the franchise and privilege of classical verse, without the limitations of quantitative syllabisation with which that verse was hampered We have their Order and our own Freedom besides But I am not sure that Murray either knew or meant this and we must return to specialists

Odell.

The melomania of Steele in prosody was sure to attract followers, this kind of crankery always does. Indeed we noticed some in the last volume. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, however, there were three writers of some note who, in both senses, followed him and each other. The earliest, John Odell of Cambridge, seems to have written his *Essay on the Elements, Accents, and Prosody of the English Language* as early as 1802, but did not publish it till four years later. He is purely phonetic for a long time, and mainly so always, but about p. 124 becomes prosodic. He rather dismisses "accent" and "quantity"—which is a blessing, but his substitution of "emphasis" requires a good deal of guarding to prevent its becoming a curse. Sometimes he is rather difficult to understand, as in the following passage, where I simply deny the first clause, and as for the second, I hope I am doing nothing shocking by reproducing it. "If the first syllable of 'gentle' be made long it will be 'jantle', and by the same means the word 'body' will become unfit for utterance in any decent company!"<sup>1</sup> His scansions, as with all these musicians, are anacrusic, and he thinks Milton's verse "often faulty," and, when not so, admitting three, four, five, or even six, "cadences." But the most illuminating thing I have found in him is the following arrangement of a stanza from Rogers with "quaver-rests"

That | very 7 | law which | moulds a | tear  
And | bids it 7 | trickle 7 | 7 from its | source—  
That | law pre|serves the | earth a | sphere  
And | guides the | planets | 7 in their course

<sup>1</sup> In order to understand this at all you must first grant (what I utterly deny) that a "long" syllable requires a "long" vowel, and secondly (what I deny as strongly), that long *e* becomes *a*, and long *o*, *aw*.

Now I am a blameful heathen, ἄμωσος in the narrower Platonic sense, though not ἀγεωμέτρητος, an outcast—but this sort of thing makes me seem to perceive the effect of the “Old Hundredth,” and similar things, on people to whom the real prosodic scansion is as secondary, and almost as unfamiliar, as the musical is to me. And I begin to understand a good deal about them.

• John Thelwall, “Citizen” and elocutionist, appears, Thelwall, for all his “Citizen”-ship, to have been not a very bad and rather a clever fellow. At any rate, he had some very good friends, and he seems to have had the sense to settle down from his early republican *freedoms* to the comparatively innocuous, though not quite necessary, business of elocution-teaching. But there were two moments of his life at which, as it seems to me, he would have been “none the worse of a hanging.” The first was when he made his celebrated joke about the head on the pot of porter and that on kings and princes—a joke which, at the moment, had too much of the practical about it, and invited a practical return. The second was when, in 1812, he published his *Illustrations of English Rhythmus by John Thelwall, Esq.* [this “Esq.” was surely rank “incivism”], *Professor of the Science and Practice of Elocution*.<sup>1</sup>

I think I should have given him his deserts on both occasions had this been possible, and on the latter have followed the excellent principle of the mob in *Julius Caesar*—that if he did not deserve to be torn in pieces for a conspirator, he did for his bad [scansion of] verses.

<sup>1</sup> The book seems to vary in the copies found, which is likely enough from the note on the title page—the full title is much longer than that given, which is the *half-title*—“10s 6d, in boards. Bound with duplicates, etc., for the use of the Pupils of Mr. Thelwall’s Institution, One Guinea. With MS. quotations for the use of persons with Impediments, Twenty Guineas.” Mine seems to be a normal copy enough. It consists of a body of selections in prose and verse—diversified from an ordinary anthology only by the marking of the “*appoggiatura*” (see next page) with the short quantity mark, and an Introduction of seventy-two pages. Once more, as in the case of Steele, whom Thelwall accepts almost implicitly, I am in hopeless discord with my friend Mr. Omond about Thelwall. But I do not think it necessary to “fight a prize” with him on the subject, as I think I can make myself clear in the text without it. Guest was made amusingly unhappy by the “*appoggiaturæ*”.

I do not say that there is nothing redeeming in his Introduction, which, after all, is mainly a professional puff of his own methods with stammerers and "stickit" speakers of various kinds, and so to be pardoned. He abuses all his forerunners except Steele, Odell, and Roe (*v inf*), being not quite sure of Roe, and blusters about "jargon," "mistake of cadences," etc. But he starts with Steele's *six* cadences in a heroic line, which is utterly fatal to any pretensions to prosodic ear, insists on "necessary progress from strong to weak" (except in the Duck, which has no progress at all, it seems, and the Guineapig, which has, as Mr Mantalini would say, a "deind" progress from weak to strong), and finally lands himself in what shocks even Mr Omond—a promiscuity of "cadences"—six, seven, eight, or *was Sie wünschen*. That in his polemic with the accepted prosody of his earlier, and indeed of his later days, he has sometimes struck out true remarks—*eg* that iamb, trochee, and spondee can be really equivalent—I do not deny, and though his "appoggiatura," (plural "appoggiaturæ"!) for the extra or "elided" syllable of a trisyllabic foot, is superfluous in the singular and preposterous in the plural, the acknowledgment of its presence is something.

But, if only *pede claudo*, I must come to his scansion. He begins, I have said, with the ordinary Steele-chopped unnaturalness of a syllable, four trochees and another syllable for a heroic line—a thing of itself enough to damn any prosodist. But simple *lèse-prosodie* of this kind is never sufficient, and indeed never can be, for this kind of person. Having no ear, he can permit his deafness any vagary. Here are some of those<sup>1</sup> which Thelwall does permit himself and it

Arms and the | man I | sing | who | forced by | fate

Hail | holy | light | offspring of | heav'n first | born

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<sup>1</sup> M Verrier's (*v inf*), which I have read since, sometimes remind me of Thelwall's

To | momentary | Consciousness a|woke

A|bominable | un|utterable | and | worse

He had a | fever | when he was in | Spain

Now no one of these can possibly be accepted, as an even possible scansion, by any one who has any correct notion whatsoever of the rhythm of English speech. They are, one and all, heterogeneous bundles of unrelated, unproportioned, unrhythmical doggerel—gasp-bursts of infinitely worse than prosaic non-metre, which could come naturally only to a man out of breath with violent running, or under the pressure of some more strange and unusual physical impediment. They *might* come from one of Mr Thelwall's worst twenty-guinea stammerers in his most grotesque paroxysms, though I never heard anything quite so bad. The arrangement of such things in coherent and harmonious verse-paragraphs, stanzas, or combinations of any kind would be impossible: you might as well regiment, and attempt to drill, a company of hopeless and fantastic cripples, no two of whom should have quite the same distortion. It is perhaps not insignificant that Thelwall not merely adopts musical terminology, but devotes great attention to the physical side of voice-production. Too much attention to either in prosody is almost uniformly dangerous, but I never knew the two combined without a hopeless breakdown. And these things of his are called "cadences"! They have the cadence of a cart-load of bricks shot into a rubbish-pit, and those not bricks fresh and uniform from the brickyard, but chips or stuck-together lumps from a broken-down wall.

Richard Roe's *Principles of Rhythm both in Speech and Music, especially as exhibited in the Mechanism of English Verse* (1823),<sup>1</sup> is Steele filtered through Odell and rectified by Thelwall (who actually had to do with it), and very largely flavoured with the author's own essences. It is so

<sup>1</sup> He had written earlier on the subject, and published, in 1801, a book which has disappeared, but which must have been known to Thelwall (*v. sup.*)



intensely musical and phonetic that it is hardly within my range. I go to my dentist when I wish (or do not wish) to have a "mode of ascertaining the apertures of the teeth" applied to me. But I can take Roe sometimes and find him of much value—not perhaps quite in his own way. It is significant that he would like to get rid of rhyme—or keep it very much "in its proper place." It is more so that he not only admits trisyllabic feet—that is the solace of the musical sin—but goes on to *tetrasyllabic*, and would inflict on the luckless Milton such a scansion as

Wallowing, *ux*|wieldy, *e*|normous | in their | gait,

which *prosodically* makes it a string-halting dactylic

But a sentence worth a hundred thousand is this "I have not often met with a regular stanza in music, except in vocal music, *where it generally results from an adherence to the measure of the words*." It would be absolutely impossible to have a clearer confession, from a more competent witness, of the fact of the difference between music and prosody—of the fact that the "measure of the words" is something to which the "measure" of the *notes* may adhere or not, of the other fact, that such an all-important prosodic thing as "stanza" (compare Mitford's remark about "rhyme," and Roe's own just-mentioned abhorrence of it) hardly exists *in rebus musicis*. For these and other things, as well as for a certain "thoroughness," I am obliged to Richard Roe. But as a prosodic authority I cannot accept him at all, and I hope that when John Doe writes his little book on the subject it will be entirely different. From this trinity of sectaries we may return to more isolated authors and books.

Warner

The curious *Metronariston* (1797) of Dr. John Warner<sup>1</sup> is mainly concerned with the old dispute about *classical* accents, but brings in a good deal of English matter, though somewhat confusedly. Warner, despite this con-

<sup>1</sup> Whose name, however, does not appear in it as author. It is well worth reading.

fusion, and that semitone of persiflage which irritates some, has a great deal of sense in him, and might have gone far. His plea for quantitative reading of Latin needs no urging on those who were lucky enough to be taught to do this half a century ago, but appears still to be a counsel of perfection to most Englishmen and all foreigners. He has some astonishingly acute and wide-ranging remarks—as this (which knocks the phonetic-musical extravagances on the head at once) “Every slight variation of sound is no more the same to every ear than is every slight shade of colour to every eye.” And we must return to his immensely important if (directly) wrong suggestion of scanning Homeric hexameters anapæstically with anacrusis.

Dean Herbert of Manchester is not a man to be Herbert spoken of lightly, for his verse, though not very readable (men who knew French must have repeated “*Après l’Attala, ho!à!*” with some relish in his case, for he wrote a long poem on the Hun), is correct enough, and he did various services to literature. But his criticism of Mitford’s second edition (*v. sup.* vol. II p. 563) in the *Edinburgh* for July 1805 is of little value. Much of it is merely phonetic, and therefore of no interest to us, and much more is on strictly classical metre. In fact, though he treats his subject (who, be it remembered, was a wicked Tory) with even more than the usual Blue and Yellow *de haut en bas*, he does not know a tithe of what Mitford knew on the matters of English verse, and his generalisations of accentual laws are of the usual hopelessly arbitrary kind. “If a monosyllabic adjective and substantive are joined, the substantive has acute and the adjective grave accent, unless the adjective be in antithesis” *Chansons que tout cela!* as the smallest experiment will prove, even if, which is going far, the existence of “acute” and “grave” accent in English be granted. The reason of the blunder, of course, is that old and entirely baseless delusion (the origin of which I have in vain endeavoured to trace, unless it is some pseudo-classical analogy) that two acutes cannot come together.

without a pause I would undertake, if I had breath enough, to put two thousand together without one. And further on he illustrates, rather more boldly, the other fallacy which is at the root of half the fantastic tricks played with English, especially with Miltonic, scansion, by laying it down that "to," "the," "of," etc., can never be accented. The substitution of "emphasis" for "accent" might have saved a Dean from this blunder, for we may hope that the Very Rev the Hon William Herbert did not commit the vulgar error of slurring OF in certain clauses of the Nicene Creed, when he read or said it long afterwards in Manchester Cathedral.

Gregory

One ought not, I suppose, to be too hard on Dr George Gregory, whose *Letters on Literature* appeared posthumously in 1808, but they certainly remind one of the irregular rhyme to his name in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The book is a sort of "Blair-turned-into-a-Parent's-Assistant," wherein a devoted youth of the name of John is written to on Taste, Composition, etc. The prosodic section may be not unfairly sampled by the statements that Hotspur's speech to Blunt is a specimen of "low colloquial poetry, impossible to distinguish from prosaic composition", that "the *negligence* of quantity often adds to beauty", that Milton "is supported rather by the grandeur of his thoughts and language than by the harmony of his numbers", and, at the end, that it is time to go to "higher" subjects than metre. It would be interesting to know whether, if the young man named John ever produced, as most of us do, "low prosaic compositions," they were at all like the verses of William Shakespeare.

Criticisms on  
Southey's  
hexameters,  
the *Edinburgh*  
*Review*

Southey's views on hexameters, and his practical illustration of them in the *Vision of Judgment*, attracted more serious notice than that contained in Byron's clever and vulgar parody. And some of this affects *general* prosodic questions, so that it should be taken here and not later. The *Edinburgh Review* for July 1821 (vol xxxv pp, 143 sq) discounts its criticism by the frank animus of the opening diatribe against the Laureate.

"Effete," "dotage," "deliration," etc., are words too much in need of the old scornful caution

As if a man should spit against the wind, etc

But though the personal and political prejudice continues throughout, the critic does make a serious attempt to criticise the metre. His criticism may be divided into two parts, or perhaps three. His opinion on hexameters in English, his reasons for this, and his general prosodic theory. As for the first, I cannot quarrel with him when he says that "the hexameter line can never be made a legitimate English measure." But his reasons are weak. They connect themselves with a general theory of English verse which is wholly, or almost wholly, in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. We cannot have hexameters, *because* "we do not in our verse depend on long and short, but on accented and unaccented syllables" (he spars with Southey on the absence of spondees, but in reality seems to agree with him on this point more than he differs), and *because* we cannot count two unaccented syllables as equal to one accented. "An accented syllable cannot be made up of two or twenty unaccented ones." Now this is undoubtedly true, but of course the question remains, "Can *what the accented syllable supplies to English verse* be made up in this way?" He does not meet this question directly, because he has made up his mind that accent *qua* accent is the thing, but he evidently has it, as a familiar phrase goes, "in the tail of his eye." He understands what equivalence means, and is so very bold—not to say rash—as to cry it down in one of those interrogations which are meant to outdo the strongest negation. "Is it true that in any known English metre it is possible to exchange two unaccented syllables for one that is accented—for instance, to substitute the word 'maintenance' or 'abstinence' in place of 'maintain' or 'abstain'? Is there any ear to which these would appear equivalent?" I, of course, should answer "Yes" and "Mine" to these two questions, quite quietly and confidently as far as metre goes, though the substitution

of noun for verb might be difficult grammatically, and an evident *dolus* lurks in the special and separate words selected. But our reviewer could not be expected to admit it, because he is sure that the *e* in "feathery" and "watery" is not pronounced, and thinks that in Pope's famous line the "curse on *all laws*" has, among its other deleterious effects, that of "crushing" them into an iamb. The paper is an interesting one, because it shows Byssism very much informed, but practically unaltered, a hundred and twenty years after Bysshe. And, as I have hinted more than once, I am not sure that, nearly a hundred years later still, this orthodoxy does not seem really orthodox to some people.

Tillbrook

A year later Samuel Tillbrook, Fellow of Peterhouse, printed at Cambridge a small treatise, *Historical and Critical Remarks on the Modern Hexametrists and upon Mr Southey's "Vision of Judgment,"* in which he makes an indirect but dignified and scholarly protest against the *Edinburgh's* Billingsgate. He does more, for he shows an acquaintance with the Elizabethan hexametrists, and prosodists generally, which is quite surprising and extremely creditable. But he does not like the measure any better than the reviewer did, though perhaps his reason—the abundance of monosyllables in English,—despite its nobler ancestry and precedent, is not much stronger. I do not myself see why monosyllables of themselves are anti-hexametrical any more than they are (in the reality of Mr Pope's practice, though not in his theory) anti-heroic. That the real fault is that English *will* "tip up" its dactyls into anapæsts does not seem to have occurred either to the Fellow of Peterhouse or to the reviewer in the "Blue and Yellow." Indeed I do not know any prosodist who has given the fact its full importance, though Campion "gave a lead" to the discovery three centuries ago, and though that odd person, Dr John Warner (*v sup*), had "glimpst the panther" before the end of the eighteenth century.

Crowe

The *Treatise of English Versification* (1827), written in his old age by the Rev. William Crowe, Public Orator

at Oxford and author of *Lewesdon Hill*—a harmless protuberance, but scarcely to be entered for competition with “Cooper’s” “Grongar,” “Strawberry,” and the others—is a very nicely arranged little book. If you could do with a book as you do with a bottle or a canister—empty out the contents and keep the form—I should like to do this with it and fill it with my own notions. His appear to me hopelessly *bornés*, as mine would no doubt seem to him wildly anarchic. He tries, for instance, to systematise and generalise “combinations,” that is to say, stanzas of no strict correspondence in verse-length, but “cuttit and broken.” One of his injustice-decreeing and beauty-spoiling laws is that a very short line must not follow a very long one—which, of course, disqualifies many of the most delightful seventeenth-century and nineteenth-century adjustments. And what poem would the reader select to fit the following description?—“It would not be easy to frame anything more different from what it ought to be than the combination of short measures, double rhymes, and false thoughts in . . .”

A fresh and independent paragraph must be consecrated to the answer. This falsely thought and impropriely combined piece is one of the most exquisitely pathetic, and at the same time most exquisitely executed, things in English—Ben Jonson’s Epitaph on Salathiel Pavy, part of which adorns p. 156 of our second volume, and the prosody of which is pure honey blended with the pure nectar of poetry.

It is not wonderful that Crowe thought contemporary poetry “slovenly,” and it is probable that he thought the Greek Anthology false wit and doubtful verse. But he was evidently a good old man, and perhaps it is only the grace of God that makes one different from him in prosodic view.

Some persons of a certain traditional repute, but little real importance, may now be grouped together. Payne Knight in his *Analytical Enquiry into the Principles of Taste*, 1805, is a capital example of the off-hand shallowness with which our subject has so often been, and is so

Some others—  
Payne Knight

Carry.

often, treated. Milton "has left more uncouth and inharmonious verses than any other poet of eminence" People who discover melody in him are "as extraordinary anomalies as any of those they admire" Knight apparently desiderates mere "regularity", which is all the odder, because, as is well known, his general theory of æsthetic rests on the principle that "all unvaried continuity tires," on the charm of "unexpectedness," etc But just as people sing what is not worth saying, so it would seem that they expend on the art of singing in words all the inattentive and presumptuous folly that can be spared from more fortunate subjects—One would not perhaps expect much good on English verse from John Carey, the industrious and not useless compiler of the commonest *Gradus ad Parnassum*, the editor of many classics, the manufacturer of "cribs" and "keys" innumerable, and the "improver" of Dryden's *Virgil* in a most tiresome and unjustifiable fashion Nor does one get much He is Bysshier than Bysshe English poetry is "entirely regulated by number and accent of syllables" He thinks that the beautiful common measure with catalectic first and third "would not be worthy of notice if it had not been adopted by some polished writers" Rhyme is once more "a meretricious ornament of barbarous origin" "We do *not* pronounce 'murmuring' as three syllables," which means that we deprive the onomatopœia of all its value But "on *very rare* occasions"—the italics are his own—a real trisyllabic foot may be good

Frere and  
Blundell

On the other hand, a few noteworthy general points may be picked out here from the generally negligible or postponible hexametrists The eccentricities of which they can be capable when they are musicians are well shown by no less a person than Hookham Freie As a prosodic practitioner, the part author of the *Anti-Jacobin*, the author in entirety of the work of "Whistlecraft," and the translator of Aristophanes, needs neither excuse nor allowance, and his notion of an extra initial syllable in the English hexameter need not shock those who regard that metre as, in reality, a mere

"rickle" of anapæsts But when he tells us that the said English hexameter has six "bars" and the heroic "two bars and a half" the old despair comes upon the non-musical reader Another somewhat eccentric practitioner and theorist of this tribe is James Blundell, who in 1838 (the year of Guest) printed, in a very handsome quarto, *Hexametrical Experiments* in translation of Virgil's *Eclogues*, with copious introduction and notes He betters Frere by suggesting redundant syllables anywhere, and, like him, produces tolerable go-as-you-please *anapæstasters* But the most interesting thing about him is that he postulates, in addition to long, short, and common, a new quantity, "double-short," and that this when examined is found to be a relic of the old "apostrophation" or "elision," the syllables in question being such as the *z* in "radiant" and the *e* in "awakening," in other words, Thelwall's "appoggjaturæ" Unfortunately this leads him to impossible feet which he calls tribrach- and polybrach-dactyls, such as

Echoing re|sound

and

Im|measurable a|byss

—things which no doubt can be "crushed" into some sort of feet, but only into such as those of Chinese ladies

It will have been seen that the prosodic work of the very last years of the eighteenth century and the first forty (postponing Guest) of the nineteenth—the period corresponding roughly to that between the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads* and the close of the first great poetical procession ushered by that appearance—is by no means inconsiderable in bulk<sup>1</sup> But the consideration which it deserves—at least according to the view of the subject taken in this book—shrivels uncomfortably when we come to analyse and estimate It is true that the interest in the matter which, as we saw, distinguished the middle and later eighteenth still exists, and that, to a certain extent at any rate, there is *continuous* study of the subject

<sup>1</sup> Some ekings of it, and much more discussion than I have given, will be found in Mr Omond, *opp cit*



But this continuity, though to be found in two or even three different directions of sequence, is for the most part vicious or futile. It exists among the musical gnostics (as we may call them) of prosody, with their three or six or eight bars in a heroic line. It exists among the sand-  
rope twisters and ploughers of the sea, who pursue the endless and hopeless battle of accent and quantity. It exists, in a certain sense, among those who, though as different in tone and temper as the *Edinburgh* Reviewer of Southey and the Oxford Public Orator, hold to the pseudo-orthodoxy of which Bysshe is the true, though mostly unacknowledged, prophet. But of all these things it may be said that they are not, and except by accident cannot come to, good. A very large part of the prosodic interest of the time, moreover, is devoted to a single question, that of the English hexameter, which, though it certainly does belong to the subject, had much better never have done so.

Of the true prosodic process—exploration of the whole course of English poetry and submissive interpretation of the lessons thereof—hardly any one of these writers seems to have the slightest idea, and when an earlier prosodist, Mitford, returns to his work in their own time and improves it in this direction, they either pay no attention to this part of his book or, like Herbert, majestically snub him for it. Perhaps it was impossible that the increasing knowledge of the subject which Warton, Headley, Ellis, and others had given should be quite without effect—they *do* show something a little beyond the blank ignorance of facts and history which had distinguished complacent theorists like Steele and Young. But if they know a little more, their extra knowledge does them no good. On the contrary, a man like Crowe, who is himself in a way *du métier*—a scholar too, and, greatest wonder of all, an amiable scholar,—avails himself of his knowledge of the exquisite, and prosodically exquisite, lyrics of Ben and Donne only to blaspheme them.

They were contemporary with a new poetic-prosodic

movement almost or quite as important as that of 1580-1660 itself, but they either took no notice of it, or passed it by on the other side, or sneered at it as modern or slovenly, or paid strict attention to its actual "freaks," such as the hexametrical extravagation. It is evident, however, that most of them were not much otherwise minded towards Southey's good lyrical prosody, and that of his poetically greater successors, than towards his bad hexameters. The *Quarterly* on Keats's heroics, the *Edinburgh* earlier on Scott's octosyllables, others up to the early—and not so very early—reviewers of Tennyson, are all evidently under a sort of spell. They cannot see the sweep and fluctuance of the light white sea-mew, the crouch and curve and spring of the sleek black pantheress. Both animals are to them articulated skeletons merely, and the bones do not rank and clank in the proper order and with the expected rattle of regularity. From Mitford's second edition in 1804 to Guest's work in 1838 there is not a single book that seems to me to be of the slightest interest or value except historically. I and my kind must read them, and to us they have both interest and importance, though, no doubt, these will vary, in nature and measure most remarkably, according to the individual's reading and his views. I have given indications of them distinct enough, and (to my thinking) characterisations of them full enough, to enable any inquirer to find them, and to give him at least some notion whether they are worth finding or not. But if any save a specialising student of a rather unusual kind were to ask me, "*Ought I to read these men?*" I should reply, "Unless you have exhausted everything else up to the year 1900, except works on the currency and on Biblical criticism—no!"

## INTERCHAPTER IX

IN the present Interchapter we have not, as we had in some or most, if not all former ones, to collect and sum up the evidences of one or more important developments of a definite kind—the progressive constitution of rhythm up to Chaucer, its emphasising and regimenting by him, the break-up under his successors, and the restoration by Spenser and his contemporaries, the rise of blank verse, its decay in drama, and its reorganisation as a non-dramatic form by Milton, the battle of the couplets and the victory of the enclosed form, its tyranny, and the gathering evasions of it and opposition to it. These stages are past—each of the progressive and constructive ones has left its gain, and each of the retrograde and destructive intervals its warning, for good and all.

Now, things are different. We have not seen in this last Book—we shall not see in the present volume—any definite *advance* in English prosody such as is marked by the different metres of Chaucer and Spenser, by the blank verse of Shakespeare and Milton, by the couplet of Dryden and Pope. And most certainly we shall not see what not merely the *Quarterly* Reviewer of *Endymion* in 1818, and Guest twenty years later, but even Coleridge, in censuring the early prosody of Tennyson, thought he saw—a *débâcle* and dissolution of prosodic well-being, such as prevailed wholly in the fifteenth century, and partially in the seventeenth. Even the discredited couplet is not so much dethroned as established on its own special throne with others round it—reduced to its proper functions. But the theoretical and arbitrary principles on which the domination of that couplet had been based

disappear utterly as guides of practice, though for some time they may be cherished, may indeed never be wholly abandoned, by certain preceptists

It can hardly be improper to try to separate, and put before the reader, some of the general revolutions in prosodic practice which display themselves in this great change. The most important of all, according to the views of the present treatise—the most important, I should think, according to all views, though it may be regarded with different feelings by those who hold them—is the practical abolition of the strict syllabic theory, and the admission of Substitution and Equivalence. We saw<sup>1</sup>—not in the non-extant text, but in Southey's scornful and explicit reply—Wynn's affirmation of the older principle before the eighteenth century closed, we have seen the *Edinburgh* Reviewer's reaffirmation of it when the nineteenth was well established. But the practice—and in the rather rare cases where they theorised, the theory—of almost all poets was against it, even though old habit might be so strong that they sometimes unnecessarily "apostrophated" words to suit the older notion. Southey, as we have said, had plumply denied any fault, and summoned Milton as his compurgator, Coleridge's curious *Christabel* Preface, in whatever fashion, directly abrogated the prohibition. The practice, if not the theory, of Scott and Byron was identical with that of Coleridge. Wordsworth was writing, if not publishing—

*Reverence* was due to a being thus employed  
(*Prel* 265),

and little of a prosodic innovator as he was, was certainly <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> not intending it to be printed or read—

Rev'rence was due t'a being thus employed

There could be no doubt in any one's mind what was the system of Shelley or of Keats, however little authority he might attach to that system. And so with all, both great

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* pp 49, 50

and small—the doctrine of strict syllabic uniformity was being told, by almost every volume of verse that issued from the press with any sign of youth or vigour, that “’twas time for it to go”

The second intruder that received notice to quit from the practice of this quarter of a century was the doctrine of the primacy of certain lines and combinations of lines, and the restriction of the ~~less highly-placed~~ ones to certain subjects. As we have seen, some seventeenth and eighteenth-century opinion had held, not merely that the decasyllable did absolutely overtop and overshadow every other line, and the decasyllabic couplet every other combination, but that beside it and the octosyllable, with the extension of the one by redundance and the curtailing of the other to sevens, hardly anything else needed to be taken into account. Now, indeed, reached this extravagance. Prior had early secured a *privilegium* for the *anapæst*, and “common measure,” “long measure,” romance-sixes, Pindarics, and a few others were tolerated for special purposes. Spenserian imitation was at least half burlesque, and no serious poem of any importance in the measure can be cited except the *Castle of Indolence* (not wholly serious) and *The Minstrel* (not of much importance). Now, all this was again changed. People wrote long and serious narrative poems in continuous octosyllables, in rhymeless Pindarics, in Spenserians, in any and every measure that they chose to employ—some at least of these requiring lines quite outside the old “customs regulations.” And in lyric—which was assuming greater and greater importance with every new poet of the major clans who appeared—the notion of a few limited forms had disappeared from the poetic mind. Verily might it be said, transferring to prosody one of the sentences of one of the greatest passages of English prose, “In the fabric of habit which they had so laboriously built for themselves mankind were to remain no longer.”

And as this fabric broke and crumbled under the pressure of the new poetry, fresh beams and blocks of wall were perpetually joining the crash. The study of

Milton and of Shakespeare—who, as it has been said, are between them really sufficient to destroy all prosodic error—was upsetting the doctrine of the centripetal pause, the last stand for which was just about to be made, though on grounds which would have been to Bysshe a stumbling-block and to Johnson foolishness, at the very close of our sub-period, by Guest. The prohibition, or at least the anxious and gingerly allowance of “wrenched accent,” “inverted stress,” or whatever it be called, was also being swept away by these two irresistible influences. We have heard the *Quarterly Reviewer’s* cry of scandalised indignation at the absence of “a complete thought in a complete couplet”, ten years after he wrote—nay, almost at the time when he was writing—hardly any younger poet would have hesitated for one moment at enjambement whenever it seemed good to him, either as a continuous or as an occasional instrument. The unreasonable exaltation of rhyme which the eighteenth century<sup>1</sup> had seen, while restricting it to less than half its powers, had provoked an attack of that rhymeless measles which comes now and then in the centuries. But by 1820 or thereabouts both had settled into the only reasonable attitude of mind on the subject—that rhyme is good and that blank verse is good, “as the *φρόνιμος* may determine”—as the sensible and responsible poet shall decide, according to his occasions and necessities.

The result is that, as was pointed out in the preceding chapter, the preceptist work of the period may be, unless as a matter of duty, almost wholly neglected. Except as regards the historical part of Mitford, and a little of that “battle of the hexameter” which we mainly postpone, these writers *mai non fur vivi*—they were not alive themselves to the actual life of prosody, and they had nothing to do with it.

✓ But that life itself was intense, burning, varied, as hardly ever before. Almost every poet—with scarcely

<sup>1</sup> I am obliged here to state the case strongly, but I may refer to my actual treatment of eighteenth century poetry to show that I have no uncritical contempt for it. I am glad that some of those who know it best and esteem it most highly have acknowledged my treatment to be not unfair.

the exception of survivals like Crabbe and Rogers, nay, with perhaps *only* the exception of the latter among men of any mark—was consciously or unconsciously ransacking the stores of the older English poetry for models to follow or to vary, for principles to fortify and to guide him. We have Coleridge saying and doing the truest of things though he may call them by the wrongest of names, we have the sober Wordsworth almost pirouetting (not, it must be confessed, to advantage) in the middle of his most solemn and enthusiastic chant. And, most important and instructive of all, we have in Shelley and in Keats two absolutely capital examples, of the poet to whom this new-old variety comes almost as a matter of inspiration or intuition, and of the poet who attains it by hard, constant, backward-and-forward study of patterns. We get a man like Southey—who has been steeped in English poetry almost from his cradle, and certainly since he was breeched—fearlessly asserting the great law of equivalence as well as practising it, and appealing to precedent for his authority, and we get a man like Byron—who actually pretends to prefer eighteenth-century manners and modes—stumbling upon a real modern invention, though starting from ancient lines, in the “*Hardée*” garden-song. Everywhere in the eighteenth century, though we were not unfair to what we found there, we found uniformity, neglect and indeed prohibition of experiment, blindness to the lessons and the achievements of the past. Everywhere in the early nineteenth we find variety, audacious, tentative, eager discipleship, and fresh striking out in the lines of the great poets of that past.

But, in addition to all this, innovations, or rather restorations, of a character almost as important for prosody, and of a more insidiously pervading though less obvious kind, were being made in Diction. It has been pointed out that though Wordsworth was hopelessly wrong in his argument against poetic diction in general, he was quite right in his objection to the particular poetic diction of the eighteenth century, with its eccentric

and contradictory blend of false dignity, arbitrary selection, objection to archaism even of the best kind, and yet maintenance of a rococo jargon which was emphatically "no language" It has also been noted in passing that the *Quarterly* man is almost more severe on Keats's diction than on his verse or the conduct of his theme, and that, though Keats was undoubtedly vulnerable on this head, the *Quarterly* objections are directed at least as much to excellent things as to things not so excellent The fact was that the practice—must it be repeated once more that the various degrees of consciousness in this practice do not matter at all?—of all important poets tended to the breaking down of arbitrary restrictions, the removal of capricious preferences, the throwing open of the immense treasures of actual English vocabulary to the poet, and the permission to increase them, if he could, with his own coinage and manufacture A side-truth of Wordsworth's false theory was that no word was necessarily too low or familiar for poetry unless it necessarily comported ludicrous associations, that no word was too high or remote for it unless it was really unintelligible, that native and foreign, ancient and modern, technicality, and even (as in Shakespeare often) some kinds of jargon, might be chosen by the spirit of poetry to express the wonderful works of the God thereof The poet had had to clothe and tincture his thought with a vocabulary of drab stucco, he was now re-endowed with the power of investiture in mosaic of gems, and in enamel of molten porcelain and gold

In a connection rather causal than merely coincident with these great changes, enormously increased duty was laid on prosody in carrying out the two new aims, of increased appeal to audible and visual effect, which have distinguished nineteenth-century verse, and in promoting that great return to lyric, that substitution of the short poem for the long, which has been another distinctive feature of it The memorable encomium of the younger Pitt on *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*—that it contained effects at which he could have conceived a painter aiming,



but never before a poet<sup>1</sup>—might have been matched—perhaps was, though I do not remember any single passage or expression as memorable—on the other side. *The Ancient Mariner* and some other things of Coleridge, still more numerous ones of Keats and Shelley, and even of some minors, contain things that one familiar only, or mainly, with eighteenth-century verse might have conceived a musician aiming at, but never a poet. It was, of course, and it is open to a stickler for precise separation of arts to contend that this is the vice of *metabasis*, that each art ought to keep to itself and its own weapons. To fight out that battle here would be improper, though there are probably few readers who require to be told on which side I should range my humble pugnacities. But it is relevant, if it be hardly necessary, to point out again how powerfully prosody can, and did, contribute to the attainment of these new or, in their measure, increased aims. In the appeal to the ear, versification and diction together take practically the entire work upon themselves, in the appeal to the eye, diction has a large part, and even pure versification not a small. I do not refer to the look of the poem on the page, but to the assistance given to visualising by the division and adjustment of the lines as they strike the mind.

Still more important, and more direct, was the share of prosody in the resurrection of lyric, and in the provision of something like a second hundred years in which the English Muse once more outsang all others, except her eldest sisters in the flashing palaces and through the solitary nights<sup>2</sup> by the Ionian sea, or round the altar of the theatre at Athens. I read recently an egregious German critic who told us that English lyric was mainly prose—it is true that he told us at the same time that

<sup>1</sup> His father's favourite Spenser might have taught him better  
In Poet's wit that passeth Painter farre  
In picturing

(F. Q. III Introd. 1)

<sup>2</sup> For where does the echo of *μαρμαίρει δὲ μέγας δόμος* and *ἐγὼ δὲ μὲνα κατεύδω* and *ὁμᾶντων δ' ἐν ἀχρηλαῖς* "Ἐρρει πᾶς Ἀφροδίτα" revive, as in the choruses of *Prometheus Unbound*, and the "Naples" stanzas, and the cadences of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*?

there was no development of character in Jane Austen, and that her personages were "typical" Heaven forbid that I should speak evil of the better German lyre, for a lifelong familiarity with it, and something like a knowledge by heart of the *Buch der Lieder* and the *Roman-zero*, would paralyse my tongue if I were to dare so to blaspheme. But there is no doubt that, on the whole, it tends rather to *lullen*, if not to *lallen*, to simple crooning melodies that touch the heart but do not fire the brain with artistic rapture, like the "~~higher mood~~" of our Elizabethans and Carolines, or of those about Shelley and their successors. The removal of that strange delusion, apparent in more than one eighteenth-century preceptist, as well as in the whole practice of the period, and as we have seen curiously reiterated by Crowe in theory, after it had been broken to pieces in practice,—the delusion of reproving lengthenings and shortenings of lines and complicated twistings of rhyme—had made the more elaborate and triumphant symphonies once more possible. And the possibility was eagerly seized upon in every shape and form, for every purpose and department, from the unrhymed narrative Pindaric of *Thalaba*, which only wanted a little more *afflatus*, to the choric and melic parts of *Prometheus Unbound*, which wanted nothing that poetry could give them, from the ballad of *The Ancient Mariner* and the snatch of "The Knight's Tomb" to the ineffable harmonies of Keats's minor pieces and the strange irresponsible inspirations of Beddoes. To those to whom these things seem prose let them be prose.

As in the case of the divisions of the great period to which we have compared our present subject, the compartments here run much into one another generally, and our Interchapters and (when it comes) our Conclusion will have, in the same way, to be complementary of each other rather than merely cumulative, tallies rather than simple addition. In the thirty years or a little more which we have been specially surveying (taking Chapter I. of the present Book as a sort of antechamber) the lines

of the prosodic, as of the general poetic, development of the century were pretty firmly laid. Nor were they merely lines rebellious or negative—mere destruction of those previously accepted, mere proclamation of anarchy. In the new-old prosody it was by no means a case of *Fay ce que voudras*, but only of *Fay ce que pourras*. The lines of prohibition were, in fact, more rigid than ever, because they were real and not arbitrary. If you might not do a thing, it was not because Dick had not done it, and Tom had looked on it with disfavour, and Harry had pronounced it contrary to all the rules, but because it did not make harmonious verse. If you might do it, it was not because even Shakespeare or Milton had done it—though their practice was a pretty sure stronghold, and their authority a mighty ward and weapon—but because it *did* make harmonious verse. And if any one says, as is still sometimes and was often said, “But who is to be the judge of harmony?” I conceive (I hope without fatuity) that the question has been answered. We have seen what is implied in Pope’s preference for the line about the Tanais, we have seen that continual, if timid, protests were made against arbitrary restrictions during the very heart of the eighteenth century itself, we have seen how men were constrained to accommodate their preceptist objections to the practice of Milton and Shakespeare (to whom they all paid lip-worship more or less) by all manner of inconsistent explanations and devices.

The fact is that this prosodic ~~orthodoxy~~ of the eighteenth century was not a real thing at all: that it depended on a vicious circle of induction from arbitrarily selected instances, and practice which was made in its turn to corroborate that imperfect induction, that at the touch of anything like real study of the whole, or even a large part, of English poetry, it vanished away, like the evil things of romance at the blow of a virtuous sword or spear, at the presentation of a holy shield. That the inevitable “dram of eale” should show itself in the shape of some loose and sloppy verse, of some mawkish and

silly and affected diction, could not be helped. But the preceding period had not been saved by its "rules" from such admixture. And in this case the evil element did nothing of the noble substance to its own scandal. Even in the same poet it is only the reader whose mind is unprovided with even the least critical sieve who cannot separate Keats's imperfections from his perfections, while, in separate poets, the twaddle and the tinkle of Haynes Bayly have no more to do with Shelley's divine harmonies and perfect phrase than if they had been written in another universe during another æon. It is simply that the career is open to the talents, and that the talents are ready for the career.



BOOK X

EARLY AND MIDDLE VICTORIAN  
VERSE



## CHAPTER I

### TENNYSON AND BROWNING

Tennyson the *Poems by Two Brothers* and other earliest work—*Timbuctoo* and *The Lover's Tale*—The volumes of 1830 and 1832—"Claribel"—The "Hollyhock" song—"The Poet" and the decasyllabic quatrain—The "Palace" and "Dream" stanzas—The "Dying Swan"—"The Lady of Shalott"—"Enone"—The "Lotos-Eaters"—"The Vision of Sin"—"St Simcon Stylites"—"Love and Duty"—"Morte d'Arthur" and "Ulysses"—*The Princess*—*In Memoriam*—The Wellington ode—*Maud*—"The Voyage," etc—The anapaests of the *Ballads*—The later blank verse—The dramas—Browning The common mistake about him—His early blank verse *Pauline*—And couplet *Paracelsus* and *Sordello*—The later form not incorrect, but admitting the highest excellence with difficulty—His octosyllables—His salvation by lyric—Miscellaneous examples—"Love among the Ruins"—"The Last Ride Together"—"In a Gondola"—More miscellanies—"Childe Roland"—*Dramatis Personæ*—"James Lee's Wife"—"Abt Vogler"—"Rabbi Ben Ezra"—The later books—*Fine at the Fair*—The last varieties

IN taking the subjects of this chapter together, something more is aimed at than a mere convenient allowance of quantity, something more even has been taken into consideration than the fact that, for some sixty years, the two poets were contemporary and complementary as representatives of English poetry. The perhaps natural but always regrettable tendency to make a cockpit of literature, and to set poets to fight a main with each other, has made it customary to regard Tennyson and Browning as opposites in all respects, and perhaps specially in prosody. The fact is quite different, and I hope to show it. But it will, all the same, be better to



keep the initial surveys of their actual prosodic accomplishment separate<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson  
the *Poems by  
Two Brothers*  
and other  
earliest work

*Timbuctoo* and  
*The Lover's  
Tale*

For that of Tennyson it is naturally, except for the sake of completeness and curiosity, vain to look in *Poems by Two Brothers*. We see there the general prosodic improvement which has been noted in the last Book, and which was practically inevitable, but nothing more<sup>2</sup>. It is rather different with *Timbuctoo* and *The Lover's Tale*. Scott and Byron and Moore had been almost the only influences noticeable in the first book. They are now not only not supreme—they have almost disappeared, their places being taken, perhaps by Shelley to some extent (though Shelley was never Tennyson's special master), certainly by Keats. The blank verse of *Timbuctoo* is hardly in the least like the magnificent medium with which, in "Ulysses" and the "Morte d'Arthur," the poet was, a dozen years later, to give practically the last very great and distinct phase of the form that we have seen. It is not even like the "blanks" of the volumes of 1830 and 1832, which already, especially in *Enone*, foreshadow this magnificence. It is partly an echo of Milton direct, partly one transmitted perhaps through Wordsworth, but more probably through *Alastor* and *Hyperion*. That of *The Lover's Tale* is a much greater advance towards the later form, the peculiar and entirely novel shaping of verse-paragraph, and of verse-clauses and sentences within it, being quite visible in the

<sup>1</sup> For the fulness of the treatment I do not think it necessary to make any apology in these two the whole later prosody of English has, in a manner, its exercising ground and typical museum.

<sup>2</sup> It is curious to see how little the future master of harmonies could do with a rare one when he got it. In

I wander in darkness and sorrow,

Alfred has actually taken the measure of

I enter thy garden of roses,

but he cannot wake its music in the least. The slovenly leaving of the odd lines unrhymed, noted above as very common at this time, throws away the major part of the chance, while it is only now and then that he even keeps the redundancy. We could not have a better lesson, remembering what, in a few years, he will make out of the old quatrain in the "Palace of Art" and the "Dream of Fair Women," and what Fraed, at the very moment, was doing with this very measure

light of the later achievement, though perhaps not so easily discerned without the help of that light. With that help the peculiar *contour* of such a passage as this, which, as usual, I take almost at random, can hardly be missed.

Gleams of the water-circles as they broke,  
Flickered like doubtful smiles about her lips,  
Quivered a flying glory on her hair,  
Leapt like a passing thought across her eyes,  
And mine, with one that will not pass till earth  
And heaven pass too, dwelt on *my* heaven—a face  
Most starry fair, but kindled from within  
As 'twere with dawn

It will be observed that the phrase starts admirably, that the contrast of the "single-moulded" form of the opening and the run-on close is admirable too, but that it does not actually finish quite so well

With the two famous little volumes of 1830 and 1832-1833 that founded the last new dynasty (up to the present moment) of English poetry, it is altogether different. The poet, though he has retained the general inspiration—especially of Keats,—has ceased entirely to be an imitator in respect of metre, and he develops his genius for this with a blend of variety and individuality that I cannot remember in the opening volumes of any poet before him. It may indeed be suspected that the novelty and variety of the metrical forms in these books gave one main reason for the disfavour or neglect with which they were received, though it has long been admitted, by everybody whose opinion is of importance, that the blemishes in them were enough to set the whole pack of blemish-hunters—critics then were too often little else—on their track in full cry. When I find Coleridge himself,<sup>1</sup> the author of the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, saying that "Tennyson's misfortune is, he has begun to write verses without very well understanding what metre is," and confessing, "I can hardly scan some of his verses", when I remember that, even twenty years

The volumes  
of 1830 and  
1832

<sup>1</sup> *Table Talk* (ed. Ashe, London, 1888), p. 214. Of course this is, once more, "what the soldier," or the son-in-law, "[says he] said." But there seems to be no reason for distrusting it.

later, William Smith, the author of *Thorndale*, said,<sup>1</sup> of that exquisite and truly English song "A spirit haunts the year's last hours," "What metre, Greek or Roman, Russian or Chinese, it was intended to imitate we have no care to inquire the man was writing English and had no justifiable pretence for torturing our ears with verse like this",—I confess that a great awe falls upon me. Almost these passages persuade me to give up saying anything about prosody at all—till I remember further that Coleridge certainly did not know much of any English poetry before the sixteenth century, that Smith probably knew little, except Shakespeare and Milton before the late seventeenth, and that so the keys of purgation from such errors as these were partly withheld from them.

From our special point of view, the originals, "young" and faulty as they are, seem scarcely less remarkable than the forms which they afterwards took, as a result of one of the greatest exercises of self-denying criticism that poet ever went through.<sup>2</sup> The extraordinary slips of taste that marred the close of the "Lady of Shalott," the "Groves-of-Blarney" stanzas of the "Palace of Art," the eccentric balloon-prelude of the "Dream of Fair Women," are altogether outside the jurisdiction of this court, Prosody has no black mark, if she has no prize, for the unlucky "Darling Room," and the later and better but certainly not indispensable "Skipping Rope." A very few improvements were indeed made in this direction, but, on the other hand, not a few things altered or omitted had, to the full or in a very high degree, the marvellous magic of the versification of the new poet. It may be very seriously questioned whether there is *any* difference, save that of mere polish, between the two earlier volumes and the great collection of 1842, in poetic qualities of any kind. Those who regard as Tennyson's masterpieces such things as the "May Queen" may be

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, April 1849

<sup>2</sup> There has been, for some years, no difficulty in making the comparison, thanks to the late Professor Churton Collins's edition of the *Early Poems* with the variants (London, 1900)

shocked or scornful at this, though, after all, their respectable and amiable but feeble favourite appeared in 1833. But those who find the rays of the new planet in "The Dying Swan" and "Mariana," in the "Palace" and the "Dream," in the "Lotos-Eaters" and "Ænone," will want nothing more in one sense, though everything in another. And the *prosodic* qualities of these—the marvellous crescendo of "The Dying Swan," the moan of "Mariana," the unrivalled plastic competence and adaptation of the stanzas of the "Palace" and the "Dream," the elaborate partition of the "Lotos-Eaters," the majestic blank verse of "Ænone"—were all there from the first, and for the first time.

In fact the "quality of the qualities" is there in "Claribel" "Claribel," which, though it had been abused, the poet wisely left almost unaltered, as an overture to his work, in every issue for sixty years. The good William Smith, in the article above cited, thought that "'Claribel' leaves as little impression on the living ear as it would on the sleeper beneath." Even George Brimley,<sup>1</sup> though he admired it, was not sure what "the precise feeling of it" is. Now I do not know whether Claribel could hear her dirge, but if she did, and did not like it, she had more than the unreasonableness of woman. I do not know what "the precise feeling of it" is, because its obvious object is to excite a feeling not "precise," to give to ear and mind a "dying fall," a sound "stealing and giving odour" of quiet sadness. And if it does not do this, may I come to think English lyric prose, and to believe in accentual scansion! There are, of course, some affectations in it. I do not know that I am prepared to recommend an unlimited coinage of adverbially compounded verbs (I low-lie, thou low-liest, she low-lies), you may overdo *-eth* forms, and there is some slight libertinage of rhymes. But these are examples of the infinitely little. The point is that these purposely monotoned, but not monotonous, three-foot iambics—mostly double-rhymed, invariably single-moulded, scarcely varied with any other

<sup>1</sup> *Essays* (2nd ed. Cambridge and London, 1860), p. 5

foot, their diction carefully selected to give the dirge-cadence—an effect of *threnos*, not loud or clamorous, meditative rather, fully illustrated by pictorial touches—are so absolutely suited to the end that I really do not know whether anything of the kind in English comes nearer to the masterpiece of that kind, the Dirge in *Cymbeline*

No one, however, would put “Claribel”—singularly adequate as it is and fresh in its adequacy, characteristic, too, of the mixed visual and audible appeal of its author and of the poetry he captained—among the greatest poetic or prosodic triumphs of the two books, though it is more than a fair example of that bold launch out into the prosodic deep which is being so often spoken of. But so is almost every other piece included in the first volume. Contrast, for instance, the melancholy music, so admirably mated to the words, of “Mariana,” with the sweep of the “Recollections of the Arabian Nights,” its inclusive and varied rhyme, and the extraordinarily skilful way in which the occasional anapæsts quicken, without altering, the run of the stanza. Pindaric irregularity of line-length is absolutely mastered in the “Ode to Memory.” And then we come to the “Hollyhock” song, that was such a thorn to the author of *Thorndale*

The “Holly-  
hock” song

One reads it, wondering how any human ear could be “tortured” by it, but wondering still more how any *English* ear could be in the least puzzled by its metre. This, for all its novel effect, is—as is often the case with such metres—as simple as possible in system to any one who knows what English verse-structure is. It is simply and solely *Christabel* metre slightly “vandyked” and brought, for lyrical purposes, nearer to the anapæstic than to the iambic basis, with the common licences of catalexis and hypercatalexis (which are in almost every song of Shakespeare) used by no means very lavishly. I give the stanza<sup>1</sup> completely scanned below, and I defy any one

<sup>1</sup> A sp|rit haunts | the year's | last hours  
Dwelling | amid | these yell|lowing howers  
To him|self | he talks,  
For at e|ventide, lis|tening ear|nestly,

to find anything in it that differs in principle from "Under the Greenwood Tree" or the dirge in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

I hardly know what not to notice, but there must be limits. "The Poet," with an admirable first stanza,<sup>1</sup> is prosodically interesting as the first in order of those manipulations of the decasyllabic alternate-rhymed quatrain which were to give the matchless "Palace" and "Dream", so that the prosodic aspects of the three may be noticed together. It has been observed above that the quatrain itself, as a consequence of its gravity, is rather apt to be monotonous—even to be like the packing-cases that contained Mr Jingle's fourteen coats, "heavy, heavy, d—d heavy." Simple shortening of the even verses gives rather better outline, but not much less—in fact even greater—monotony. In the three poems Tennyson handles it in three different ways. "The Poet" is couched in 10, 6, 10, 4, giving a succinct and rather sententious metre, which suits admirably for the *γνώμαι*, the sharply-cut cumulative phrases, of that fine piece. But, by this shortening, ten syllables, the equivalent of a whole line, were lost, and this gave too little room for description, and especially for the series of pictures in scene- or figure-painting which form so large a part of the other two poems and communicate to them such extraordinary charm. So in the "Palace" Tennyson "eked" the stanza, extending the second line to eights and the fifth to sixes.<sup>2</sup> This, besides actually giving a

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At his work | you may hear | him sob | and sigh  
 In the walks,  
 Earth|ward he bow|eth the hea|vy stalks  
 Of the moul|dering flowers  
 Hea|vily hangs | the broad | sunflower  
 O|ver its grave | in the earth | so chilly,  
 Hea|vily hangs | the hol|lyhock,  
 Hea|vily hangs | the ti|ger-lily

<sup>1</sup> The poet in a golden clime was born,  
 With golden stars above,  
 Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,  
 The love of love.

<sup>2</sup> I built my soul a lordly pleasure house,  
 Wherein at ease for aye to dwell

little more room, admits more varied "fingering," together with a sort of *ogee* effect of outline, which is wonderfully attractive—a taper, but with a swell in it. In the "Dream"—more narrative and with larger aims—he wanted more space still, and a form that would link itself better. He gets this by keeping *three* decasyllables with a final six<sup>1</sup>. This is an exceedingly cunning as well as beautiful device, for, on the one hand, the large majority of decasyllables, batched in threes, assists the narrative effect, which is always hard to achieve with stanzas of very irregular outline, and, on the other, the short final line serves at once as final to the individual stanza, and hinge to join it to the next.

The "Palace"  
and "Dream"  
stanzas

The adaptation of these three forms to their matter is exemplary. The fine, if very slightly rhetorical description of "The Poet" builds itself up with sentence after sentence, the apples of gold being duly set in the picture of silver by the stanza. This quality is not lost in the "Palace of Art" extension—it comes out admirably in the verses describing the soul's period of despair. But its aptitudes for description, in the enlarged content and in the slightly less zigzagged and more flowing outline, are the points to notice. Only the very best and most concentrated pictures of Spenser, and the great portrait of Madeline praying in the *Eve of St Agnes*, equal these frescoes of the "Palace" in colour, draughtsmanship, and atmosphere, while I know nothing in poetry, English or foreign, ancient or modern, that surpasses them, except that which surpasses everything—Dante's picture of the gate of Purgatory with the steps in mirrored marble, and riven fire-grimed blue, and flaming porphyry, and the sworded angel in the ashen cloak sitting with his feet on the crimson stone. Some of the stanzas of the "Palace"

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I said, "O Soul, make merry and carouse,  
Dear soul, for all is well."

<sup>1</sup> I read, before my eyelids dropt their shade,  
The Legend of Good Women, long ago  
Sung by the morning star of song, who made  
His music heard below

are not so very far below even this *apex poeseos et picturae*<sup>1</sup> While in the "Dream" the extension not merely carries us with unmatched congruity through the various episodes of the narrative, not only shows itself equal to its predecessor in descriptive quality, but rises to the admirable *διάνοια* of the last two stanzas, whose clear depths are so much deeper than the turbid experiments in *trompe-l'œil* of certain "philosophical" poets<sup>2</sup>

Fain would I dwell on other things—the gem-wrought fancy pieces on girls' names which so have irritated and do irritate Philistia, the rather more imitative but admirably effectual "Sisters" (romance-sixes with short lines lengthened), the magnificently monotonous intensity of "Fatima", the triple triumph of management of line and rhyme and refrain in "Oriana", the slightly unequal, but in parts exquisite, carolling of the "Sea Fairies" and the "Merman", the gorgeous dirge-music of the "Deserted House" and the "Dirge" itself All of these, let it be repeated, were practically what they are from the first in *numbers*, all of them indicated the possession of new colour- and tone-scheme on the part of the poet, all of them showed, to any one who could see and hear, that he had attained, if not to the unerring and inevitable, yet to the frequent and then consummate command of this scheme The fools and the children might boggle over the half-done work of phrase, and wait for the revision in 1842—to be in the majority of cases unconverted still They could see only what they brought the power of

<sup>1</sup> For instance, both in sound- and sight-magic

One seemed all dark and red—a tract of sand,  
And some one pacing there alone,  
Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,  
Lit with a low large moon

(This, by the way, was one of the later improvements)

<sup>2</sup> As when a soul laments, which hath been blest,  
Desiring what is mingled with past years,  
In yearnings that can never be exprest  
By sighs or groans or tears,

Because all words, though cull'd with choicest art,  
Failing to give the filter of the sweet,  
Wither beneath the pilate, and the heart  
Faints, faded by its heat



seeing Even John Stuart Mill in that contemporary Essay,<sup>1</sup> which is the best thing he ever did in pure literature, thought "his powers of versification not yet of the highest order," his "metres *taken at random* [!]," and his adaptation of verse to the character of his subject not masterly Perhaps the teaching of James the Abominable came in here, more probably it was simple time-blindness—which time alone can remove But *we* have no excuse of the kind, and for my part, though I freely confess the youthfulness, and the imperfection in many ways, of the volumes of 1830 and 1832, I want nothing more to enable me to show, not from the prosodic side only, but from the prosodic side *here*, that the "blest unfabled incense tree" of English poetry then saw a fresh Phoenix-birth of an English "poet of the century"

The "Dying  
Swan"

The single instance of the "Dying Swan" would suffice as a diploma-piece from the prosodic point of view We have seen various forms of "suiting sound to sense," some of them quite rudimentary, some a little less so, but in all, of course, from the simplest to the most complex, the means adopted must affect prosody, must indeed be provided by it Never before had—I really do not know whether, even in Mr Swinburne, ever since has—the provision reached such complexity with such success The poet takes the old equivalenced octosyllable of the thirteenth century and of *Christabel*, moulding it into an irregular stanza with more or fewer recurrences of rhyme as he pleases.<sup>2</sup> But in the first of these stanzas he avails himself very little of anapaestic substitution There are only two anapaests<sup>3</sup> in ten lines In the second—of the same length, but very slightly varied in combination,—there are a few more, some eight or nine, I should think, out of the forty or so feet Now in these stanzas we have merely had the *fact* of the swan's lament noted, ~~they~~ have otherwise been wholly taken up with the scene In

<sup>1</sup> *Early Essays of J S M* (London, 1897), p. 267

<sup>2</sup> The plain was grassy, wild and bare,  
Wide, wild, and open to the air, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *With an in|ner voice | the riv|er ran,*  
Adown | it floa|ted a dy|ing swan

the third we come to the death-song itself, and the metre lengthens, unrolls, is transformed by more and more infusion of the trissyllabic foot, till the actual equivalent of the "eddyng song," the "awful jubilant voice," the "music strange and manifold," is attained. Such command of sound, joined to such power of painting, might, one would think, have sent good wits and good lovers raving. Yet Mill says nothing about it in the dawn, and George Brimley, when noon was drawing on, thinks it "uninteresting" because there is no apron-string or medicine-bottle about it as in the "Gardener's Daughter" and the "May Queen." Now the "Gardener's Daughter" and the "May Queen" would be nearly as effective in prose, and might easily be put into it. I defy Sir Thomas Browne himself to give us the soul-substance of the "Dying Swan" while stripping it of its essential and inseparable body of poetry.

But there are still three pieces on which I must enlarge <sup>"The Lady of Shalott"</sup> a little, for the enlargement is not a mere piece of sensual indulgence, but a logical and almost necessary buttress and support to the general view of the development of prosody which is, or should be, given in this treatise. They are "The Lady of Shalott," "Ænone," and the "Lotos-Eaters"—all, it is hardly necessary to say, in the second volume. As has been said, "The Lady of Shalott" gained immensely by revision in some ways, but these ways were scarcely at all prosodic. Its verse, from the first, had that quality which "sweeps all before it," as William Morris said admirably of Tennyson. The run and flow, indefinitely rippled and varied in different stanzas, but continuous and prevailing, of this concatenation<sup>1</sup> is really an *altitudo*. The river that springs

<sup>1</sup> On either side the river lie  
Long fields of barley and of rye,  
That clothe the wold and meet the sky,  
And thro' the field the road runs by  
    To many tower'd Camelot,  
And up and down the people go,  
Gazing where the lilies blow  
Round an island there below,  
    The island of Shalott

The "acephalous" variation, with trochaic effect, of "Gazing, etc." is used freely, and double rhyme fairly often

in the first line floats us down to the end with its own quiet restlessness—a mirror in general smoothness, dinted with eddying swirls of rhythm

"Ænone."

You could not have a greater sign of prosodic mastery than that the author of this should also be the contriver of the blank verse of "Ænone." The advance here on the undecided and imitative medium of "Timbuctoo" and the "Lover's Tale" is only paralleled perhaps (and there not in exactly the same metre) by the difference between Dryden's "Heroic Stanzas" and the group of Restoration poems. In fact it is questionable whether the great Tennysonian blank—a descendant and representative, but in no way a copy, at once of the Shakespearian and the Miltonic—is ever shown to much better advantage, though it may receive a slight further polishing in "Ulysses" and the "Morte" and the *Princess* and the best passages of the *Idylls* before their latest stage. The famous overture as we have it now, is a clean proof-sheet of the new verse-paragraph, with its own colour, its own outline, its own resonance and symphony, and the speech of Pallas, the introduction of Aphrodite, and the splendid ringing agony of the close come, battalion after battalion, to complete the victory of the poet.

"The Lotos-Eaters"

Here, however, the poem did gain greatly by revision, prosodically as otherwise, though the perfect form was reached as early as 1842, and we may return to it in a short connected study of Tennyson's blank verse. In the "Lotos-Eaters," on the other hand, except in trifles, the revisional improvement—a very great one—was confined to the latter part, and the suggestion of the present glorious close was there originally, though rather frittered away and spoilt by some of Tennyson's early ultra-Keatsian mawkishness. Even then substantially, and much more as it stands to-day, the thing is a wonder of combined symphonic arrangement. The great Spenserians of the overture are not more beautiful than the best of *Adonais* or of the *Eve of St Agnes*—nothing could be that—but they are more Spenserian and the dreamy languor comes back for the first time, though the dream is of nineteenth-

not of sixteenth-century colour. Nothing could so well lead up to, and nothing could so well set off, the "Choric Song" that follows. Here Tennyson evidently had the same general motive of rising swell which he had hit upon in the "Dying Swan", but he carries it out on a far greater scale, and with the interludes and isolations allowed by that scale instead of by a single progressive development. You begin with a sort of modification—a dream-change like that in dreams themselves—of actual Spenserian, but the metrist does not carry it out and lapses (by accident or design) first into Phineas Fletcher abbreviation with a progressively lengthened *coda* of mono-rhymes, 6, 8, 10, 12. The subsequent strophes waver kaleidoscopically, but always harmoniously, seeking, as it were, a "waist" or narrowest part at "Hateful is the dark blue sea," a stanza of three eights and a six only, and then swelling and rising, rising and swelling, till the thing lengthens itself into the swinging fourteeners of the final *coda*. Once more there ought to have been no mistake whatever about this piece, and in a decade or two of years (it ought not to have taken a Republican decade of days) we find even Smith, and much more Brimley, the former satisfied, the latter enthusiastic.

The interest of the great volumes of 1842, which definitely estated Tennyson, lies of course largely, if not principally, in the marvellous transformation<sup>1</sup> of the earlier poems, but it adds greatly to our prosodic knowledge of the poet. And this extension of knowledge, though not confined to, is largely concentrated upon, one great form already referred to as perhaps the chief prosodic instance of Tennyson's unmatched power of self-discipline and of raising himself on stepping-stones of his earlier work to higher things. Not "confined", for the gracefully tripping "commons" of "The Talking Oak"—a measure not easy in such work to keep from a

<sup>1</sup> I cannot help thinking, as I survey the alterations, say, of "The Palace of Art" and "Ufnone," of the attempts recently made to treat the author of *Piers Plowman* as the demon of the ninth *bolgia* treated Ali and Mahomet and Bertrand de Born, and to sliver him up into gobbets. At least two people in each case *must* have written these two poems, surely!

merely trivial prettiness—should not miss notice, and the magnificent sweeping trochaic fifteneers of “Locksley Hall” insist on it. It has been said often that the trochee is not an easy foot to manage in English, but that, when it is managed, it produces a literally extraordinary effect. And this is well seen here. A language must be pretty well settled in its prosodic inheritance and that inheritance must be of the noblest, when it can give such a cadence as

And the hollow Ocean ridges roaring into cataracts,  
or  
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change

The singular depreciation which has always rested, save with a very few of the elect, on “The Two Voices” is nowhere stranger than in its failure to recognise the perfect adaptation of these pensive dropping triplets to the thought. The more genial appeal of “St Agnes’ Eve” has perhaps made more people see the beauty of its verse, which contrasts curiously with “The Talking Oak” to show the varying powers of the common measure. In the same way “Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere”—which is “Lady of Shalott” metre cunningly treated with extension of the tail-rhyme lines and substitution of a cheerful for an oppressive atmosphere of cadence—deserves careful study. The famous smaller varied lyrics, “Come not when I am dead,” “Break! break!” and “The Poet arose,” show perfectly that “past mastery” of metre, the apprenticeship, and more than apprenticeship to which Coleridge and Mill had so strangely missed. But the chief prosodic subject in this collection, apart from the group of blanks to be noticed presently, is “The Vision of Sin.”

“The Vision  
of Sin

This poem—which I am sometimes inclined to rank as the poetically greatest thing that Tennyson ever did—ranks prosodically in a class with the “Lotos-Eaters,” being a concerted piece of varying but not miscellaneous metres instead of a single movement. It begins with what may be regarded as either a couplet paragraph

ending in a Drydenian triplet with Alexandrine, or a *treizain* constituted deliberately in this fashion<sup>1</sup> The second movement,<sup>2</sup> which has been strangely taken for a modern instance of acephalous Chaucerian lines, loses all beauty if it be so regarded, and spoils the concert completely It is a shift to trochaic base, where, in accordance with the subject—the slowly welling fountain and rising song—the trochaic lines, now full, now catalectic, begin in couplet, change to a sort of *teiza*, strike strongly back to iambics with line-extension, return, in but apparently disorderly fashion (to suit subject again), to the trochaic base, and “flutter headlong” at the end, in mingled iamb and trochee, to ground A batch of regular decasyllables, rhymed now almost *Lycidas* fashion, now in quatrain with alternate rhyme, and in tercet, but never in couplet, furnishes Strophe Three But Four is entirely constituted of trochaic sevens in quatrain, tinged with a sarcastic force which Tennyson nowhere else attains, and to which the form gives admirable expression<sup>3</sup> And a fine *coda* of couplets gives the form of Five There are few more prosodically perfect examples in English of what Johnson calls “the greater ode”

<sup>1</sup> I had a vision when the night was late  
 A youth came riding toward a palace gate  
 He rode a horse with wings, that would have flown  
 But that his heavy rider kept him down  
 And from the palace came a child of sin,  
 And took him by the curls, and led him in,  
 Where sat a company with heated eyes,  
 Expecting when a fountain should arise  
 A sleepy light upon their brows and lips—  
 As when the sun, a crescent of eclipse,  
 Dreams over lake and lawn, and isles and capes—  
 Suffused them, sitting, lying, languid shapes,  
 By heaps of gourds, and skins of wine, and piles of grapes

Observe how fine this couplet is, and how *personal* We have seen how Keats studied Dryden this is as if Dryden had studied Keats

<sup>2</sup> Then methought I heard a mellow sound,  
 Gathering up from all the lower ground, etc

<sup>3</sup> The refrain stanza shows it well

Fill the can, and fill the cup  
 All the windy ways of men  
 Are but dust that rises up,  
 And is lightly laid again

But these elaborately concerted schemes are the "red ink" of prosody—they are not for constant or even frequent use. [It is in the perfection of the blank verse that we see, if not the choicest, the most solid and all-powerful achievement of these 1842 volumes. For a good deal of the substance of the poems which exemplify and illustrate it, I confess I care little. The "English Idyl," which had been started, long before, by Southey, is one of those contrivances for making poetry do the work of prose for which I have small affection. There are beautiful things, of course, in "The Gardener's Daughter," especially the Turneresque picture of Ely and the portrait of the heroine—things which show what a medium was now ready to convey anything worth conveying. I can see nothing of the kind in "Dora," which is another piece of Tennysonian "wood, hay, stubble," diversifying the silver and the gold and the gems, yet the bay and the pie in "Audley Court" are not unworthy of their verse, and there may be a line or two in "The Lake" and "Walking to the Mail." But the "Morte d'Arthur" and "St Simeon Stylites" and "Ulysses" and "Love and Duty"—

God bless us all! *they're* quite another thing!

'St Simeon  
Stylites'

The "Saint" is generally put least of the group, because people do not care for pillar-saints, but if there had been any such verses in "Dora" as there are by scores here—as indeed almost the whole piece consists of—I should take "Dora" to my heart of hearts, for all its cheap sentiment and Wordsworthian "silly sooth." It may be rational or irrational to balance yourself on pillars of increasing cubital height. I think we had better not be too sure about that either way. "You wait and see," as the Devil said to the man (at Monte Cassino, was it not?) when he observed that it was really preposterous to imagine that there could be such a place as Hell. But there is no possible dubiety—for any one who has ears to hear—about such verses as

The watcher on the column to the end,

and the splendid paragraph of pure Tennysonian structure and symphony which closes the poem. I have indeed known people laugh at "A quarter before twelve." Let them.

Indeed misjudgments of poetry are often of great interest. The late excellent Principal Sharp, while admiring "Love and Duty" for "noble and nobly rendered thought," while acknowledging its four last lines to be "pretty," considered that they "might have been spared after the passionate parting scene," and joined Bagehot in lecturing the poet on his "ornateness," using obliquely even rasher words<sup>1</sup>. These "very pretty" but over-ornate, if not even "meretricious" and "dressy" lines, are

Then, when the first low matin-chirp hath grown  
Full quire, and morning driven her plow of pearl  
Far-furrowing into light the mounded rack,  
Beyond the fair green field and eastern sea

Now it is perfectly easy—it always is if it were worth doing—to answer this philosopher even according to his own pseudo-philosophy. I thought we had heard something of the "*Versöhnung*-close"—the excellence of leaving off, if not the positive obligation to leave off, with a note of hope and comfort, with the consolation of the stars instead of the blank silence of the sun. Matthew Arnold, Mr Sharp's admired friend and fellow-critic, did it in the "Scholar Gipsy" and "Sohrab and Rustum," and I would he had never done worse. But the curious thing is that a good scholar and a real lover of nature and (as far as he could understand it) of poetry should have seen in these lines only something very pretty stuck on, as people put jam on junket for an extra sweetening. They not only present an exquisite picture in the true blend of picture and poetry, they are not only in themselves one of the most splendid pieces of blank verse in English, but they actually complete the blank verse

<sup>1</sup> "Dressy" [this, to be sure, is Bagehot's], "meretricious," "one of the evils incident to democracy." Now one may hate democracy *ὁμῶς ἅλθας πύλῃσιν*, but when it begins to make people appreciate the four lines above given, it will be time to waver in that hatred.



symphony of the whole piece—give the capital of the glorious pillar which has risen, in paragraph after paragraph of due proportion and taper and *entasis*, to the skies. Without this the thing would be truncated to the ear, and to the mind that has an ear. It must be feared that Providence or Jack Ketch has been unkind to many more minds than one would expect in this matter.

"Morte  
d'Arthur" and  
"Ulysses"

But of course the "Morte" and "Ulysses" are the summits here. There is a curious difference between them, alike as they are, and I have always wondered whether it is too fanciful to assign this, less to the subjects (which are not so very far apart, and even pretty close in some respects), than to the documents which suggested them. As is well known, Tennyson has in the "Morte," or parts of it, versified Malory with an almost Shakespearean closeness, while Malory, in his turn, had before him, not merely the mysterious "French book" (which must have been a whole library), but certain very definite English books. "Ulysses," on the other hand, was, as is equally well known, suggested by one of the very finest passages of Dante, which, however, it greatly amplifies even in "argument." Now it certainly does seem to me—it may be an error, but it is *gratissimus*—that Tennyson, while showing in each that specified and patented brand of verse which he had now reached, shows also not a little, in the one case, of the curious musical flowing fifteenth-century prose which contrasts so strangely with official fifteenth-century verse, and, in the other, of the unique combination of nervous strength and flowing music to be found in Dante's tercets. The "Morte" verse is the more undulating, the more entwined, the more various and excursive, though it can reach the utmost intensity, as in the famous passage of the throwing of Excalibur. The other is slightly more rhetorical, closer knit, more sententious and weighty, to be pronounced slower. I should take, for single-line instances, two as typical as they are well known—

So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur,  
and

Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy,

and for two entwined passages, the whole paragraph in which the one occurs, and that which follows the other<sup>1</sup>

I shall hope to return to the subject of Tennyson's blank verse when we come to *The Holy Grail*, but for the present it may be observed that his main secret—the point in which he differs from all masters before him, except Shakespeare in some of his soliloquies—is the great variety of speeds which he succeeds in getting out of it by the various devices of single-moulding, enjambment, shift or omission of pause, epanaphora (of which latterly he became dangerously fond), occasional trisyllabic feet (of which the same remark may be made), and the rest Milton had, of course, employed them all, but it was impossible for Milton to move rapidly. Now rapid movement was not Tennyson's favourite or most congenial mode in general verse, but he early succeeded in getting almost as much of it into blanks as blanks will tolerate<sup>2</sup>

It was but natural that this accomplished mastery of *The Princess*

<sup>1</sup> My knowledge of Italian is slight, but, ever since I have made a shift to read Dante in the original, I have found English verse-translations impossible—even Cary jarring, though perhaps not so much as the "stump-rhymed" tercets of Longfellow. Yet I really think Tennyson, in blank verse, might have reconciled me, though I am very glad he did not so waste his time, for verse translation of a poet by a poet always is waste time, save when it is not translation at all. *E però sappia ciascuno, che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra trasmutare, senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza e armonia* (Convito, 17)

<sup>2</sup> For they should never gabble—save for direct burlesque or grotesque effect. If the text be doubted, compare the beginning and the end of "Cenone," not a few passages in "Ulysses," and almost the whole of the central incident in "Godiva"—As I wrote this I read, with amusement which had some difficulty in keeping within the limits of respect, an attempt, made by a classical scholar of distinction, to whitewash Euripides from Aristophanes's "impertinence" by endeavouring to foist a silly and sanguine line of triviality into some of Tennyson's blank-verse exordia. There might be a good deal to say about this elsewhere. Here it is only permissible to wonder that such a scholar should be apparently blind to a simple prosodic fact. His foist is a whole line, and a whole line you may put in anywhere as burlesque—in Shakespeare and in Milton, in Marlowe and in Shelley. The point of the *Frogs* jest is the exquisite use made of Euripides's metrical style, and of his mannerism with the penthemimeral caesura, which invites the popping in his mouth of the tag *ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν*. There is nothing similar in Tennyson, though he has mannerisms enough, some of which have been often excellently and legitimately burlesqued.

the metre which seemed to be "coted and signed" as that of a long poem in English, should lead the poet to attempt one. Hitherto, whatever his private schemes may have been, he had been contented, in his published work, to follow the bent of the century and confine himself to short pieces. It is fortunately not necessary, or even proper, for us to attempt to decide whether this bent—though it happens to be one important to us—was in itself an advance or a declension. Prosody has nothing directly to do with the two great theories—the one loudly and authoritatively proclaimed from the beginning, the other rather shamefacedly and seldom supported—that "all depends on the subject," which subject should be of a certain (*ie* a considerable) magnitude, and, *per contra*, that all depends on the reaching and consummation, by the expression of the poet and the impression of the reader, of the "poetic moment"—subject, thought, action, fable, and what not, being things by no means indifferent, but not essential, inasmuch as they are shared by prose. With all this we have here nothing to do as matter of prosodic property, though it is, of course, a separable accident that the short-poem system gives more opportunities for varying prosodic success than the long, and that it can keep that success up throughout in a fashion which, human nature being what it is, the long poem can hardly observe. On the length, therefore, of *The Princess* we need say little, and on its subject, nothing at all, unless it be to point out that by this time the poet's experiments had put him in a position to adapt his metre to incidents and accidents of narrative as he could hardly have done otherwise, and that these incidents and accidents, by their variety and number, furnished him with a further exercising ground in the form.

That the result is curiously felicitous nobody, I think, has ever denied. We need not, and indeed must not, take into account the decriers of the poem or the poet because they do not agree with the principles, or are disturbed by the historical, social, and general atmosphere,

or are in other ways "not at the point of view" The blank-verse—individual, claused, and paragraphed—is of singular ease, variety and plastic resonance, and the mannerisms, which, as has been said, were certain to harden later, are as yet in scarcely any case or way excessive There is perhaps something of an approach to an overdose of epanaphora,<sup>1</sup> but it is difficult to say that it *is* an overdose as yet And the skill with which he sustains the long verse paragraph—hardly stopped at all, but paused with infinite variety—is astonishing As there had been no such short pieces of blank verse as "Love and Duty" and "Ulysses" before, so there had been no such long one since *Paradise Regained* itself For the distinct though splendid *pastiche* of *Hyperion* was not present here

Here, as always, the poet was a careful reviser, and his omission of the undignified wrangle with Lady Blanche on the battlefield was an immense gain, but the blank verse was not much affected prosodically | The addition of the songs, however, was a rich prosodic as well as poetic *bonus* There are no lyrics in English which have a much more individual and self-rendered music than "The splendour falls" and "Tears, idle tears" "Thy voice is heard" is a marvel of rhythmical adaptation, and as for "Ask me no more," the audacious challenge<sup>2</sup> to the Carolines on their own ground is brought off in "the best and most orgillous manner"—a right worshipful *randonnée* with lances fairly shivered and confessed equality for the prize

From some points of view, no doubt, Tennyson's most *In Memoriam* interesting single work in relation to strict prosody may be taken to be his instauration, and something more, of the great *In Memoriam* metre We have given an account, in the proper place, of the seventeenth-century examples—not many in number, nor, for the most part,

<sup>1</sup> "And" is naturally the commonest instrument of this, "the" perhaps next, "not" not seldom Others the most rapid run of the eye will find plentifully in the double columns of the standard one vol. edition—e.g. "Two," p. 175, column 2, "I" repeatedly in Blanche's speech, 190-191, and, in fact, *passim*

<sup>2</sup> See on Carew's piece, *supra*, vol. II p. 336

exceedingly perfect in result—of this combination. It is remarkable that in the great rummaging of our Elizabethan treasuries which the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries saw, its capacities were not earlier recognised, for (once more, as we have shown) they are quite obvious even in the imperfect examples of Jonson and Herbert, and they appear strongly when identical matter in identical line-form is transposed into this stanza arrangement<sup>1</sup>. As usual, attempts have, I believe, been made to show that Tennyson was not the absolutely first<sup>2</sup> to revive it, but they are merely curious. The thing has taken its place, practically for all time, as "*In Memoriam* metre". In fact, so powerful and absorbing were the energies which the poet spent upon it that *In Memoriam* itself seems almost to have monopolised the form—everything else in it appears *pastiche* or parody.

To this, however, Time, who sees to all things, if sometimes only to make them unseen, will certainly look, and like the Spenserian—which it resembles in possessing ~~special quality~~ <sup>special quality</sup>, though their capabilities are so different—it will be used by new poets. For this quality is indeed extraordinary, and, like some other things which we have noticed, it is a text from which to prove the folly, not merely of those who pooh-pooh prosody in general, but of those who belittle rhyme.

This is the day of (among other things) a special form of "removing our ignorance farther back" by stating things in terms of what is called psychology. And psychology may, if it will, give its own statement (calling it an explanation) of the curious fact that if you take four sounds corresponding in pairs, arrange them with trains of other sounds behind them, and then change the tip-arrangement from *abab* to *abba*, the *total* effect will be quite different. The fact is the fact { The alternate-rhymed quatrain gives, with no unpleasant touch, the effect of something like a ratchet bar motion, with checks.

<sup>1</sup> *V* *sup* n 332

<sup>2</sup> For the Rossetian coincidence, *v inf* in the proper place

The included rhyme<sup>1</sup> gives that of a sweep, in which the variation of rhyme in the first pair is obliterated or compensated by the reverse of this same variation in the second pair, and seems to constitute an unbroken circle. In other words, the *In Memoriam* quatrain is much more continuous, and has a more bird-like motion, than the ordinary "long measure," of which it is a displacement, and yet, like the Spenserian itself, it invites to continuation, though its own internal movement is so perfect.

Why this combination of word-sound should lend itself particularly to pensive meditation, is a thing much more difficult to explain, in any way not simply futile. The greater unity of the stanza, just mentioned, helps us a little, but only a little, and I do not know that we can do better than acquiesce—not with a grin—in some *quia est in illa virtus meditativa*. Once more, the fact is the fact. I defy any one to use the *In Memoriam* stanza without dropping into such a vein, unless he is contented with simple burlesque, or likes to have his metre perpetually jostling his thought, like two ill-matched walkers arm-in-arm.

But, when its conditions and limitations are accepted, it is a wonderful measure, and the secondary quality of grouping itself comes out most remarkably. I do not think that even supreme "common," measure, or ordinary "long," groups itself with anything like the same ease. The finest examples of both are cumulative. But in such a piece as, for instance, the marvellous "Old Yew, which graspest at the stones,"<sup>2</sup> though each verse is sufficiently

<sup>1</sup> In decasyllables as well as in octosyllables, but the greater *spacing* of sound-recurrence injures the effect in the longer form.

<sup>2</sup> I am not giving many quotations from Tennyson, because the passages referred to ought to be generally known, but I must give this

Old Yew, which graspest at the stones  
 That name the under lying dead,  
 Thy fibres net the dreamless head,  
 Thy roots are wrapt about the bones  
 The seasons bring the flower again,  
 And bring the firstling to the flock,  
 And in the dusk of thee, the clock  
 Beats out the little lives of men

self-contained when looked at only *in* itself, there is intimate connection between them. And when the thing ends you feel that the end is an organic completion, not a mere cutting short because enough seems to have been given, a mere absence from adding another course because the bricks are used up. Here again we have contact with the Spenserian and the sonnet—hardly with any shorter metre except rhyme-royal (which is itself nearly double the length) and a very few quintets.

The Wellington  
ode

The very difficult enterprise of the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*—a sort of attempt to "fight a prize" with the great artificial half-musical, half-prosodic compositions of Dryden and Pope—is not entirely a prosodic success. It is true that it improves steadily, and that the two last strophes are not faultily, but magnificently faultless, the final couplet,<sup>1</sup> with its slightly varied cadence or dying fall, being a *sans-pareil*. But the opening does not strike me as quite hit off: the irregular sobbing movement<sup>2</sup> is somewhat too jerky. Nor do the anapæsts of the fifth strophe seem to me quite happily inserted.<sup>3</sup> The extraordinarily fine lines and passages would save anything, poetically speaking, but I cannot call the whole a prosodic *réussite*.<sup>4</sup>

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O not for thee the glow, the bloom,  
Who change not in any gale,  
Nor branding summer suns avail  
To touch thy thousand years of gloom  
And gazing on thee, sullen tree,  
Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,  
I seem to fail from out my blood  
And grow incorporate into thee

Change the penultimate foot ("porate in") to a mere iamb and the crowning glory departs

<sup>1</sup> And in the vast cathedral leave him,  
God accept him, Christ receive him.

<sup>2</sup> Bury the Great Duke  
With an Empire's lamentation

<sup>3</sup> As, for instance

Let the bell be toll'd  
And a reverent people behold  
The towering car, the sable steeds

<sup>4</sup> About this time, and that of *Maud*, Tennyson tried various experiments, which illustrate what has been more than once said. None, I think, was

And so we come to that curious crux, *Maud*. There *Maud*, are endless things to say about *Maud*, and some that are not prosodic at first appearance have a prosodic bearing. One part of its immediate unpopularity—though the major part was undoubtedly due to the curious irrational relapse which often comes when a man, long defrauded of his due, receives it at last before he is thoroughly estated in popular esteem—was pretty clearly caused by its prosodic character. People, as we have seen, from Coleridge and Mill to Mr Smith, had been “bothered” by Tennyson’s irregularity, as they thought it (Accustomed to the steady use of a single metre, they found themselves jolted and jarred by perpetual changes). On the other hand, there is very little doubt that the poet, like many another Entellus when some pretentious Dares steps into the ring, had resolved to try a round with the Spasmodics, and even (which Entellus did not do) to fight them with their own gloves of unbridled emotion, unusual diction, and strange form of all kinds.

✱ In so far as the piece has a staple metre at all, it is to be found in a rather new, rather peculiar, and not invariably successful medium of long anapaestic lines, sometimes six-footers, sometimes five. It is impossible not to see that the longer ones, such as those in which the very questionable overture is written, have been to some extent suggested by the hexameter mania, which was specially strong rather before the middle of the century. Tennyson had too unerring a sense of

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illegitimate, and hardly one fails to contain beautiful poetry. But such things as the regularised and isolated equivalence, in one line only, of “The Dusky” and the “Maurice,” as in

And gray | metro|polis of | the North,

and

Cro cus, | ane|mone, vi|olet,

though they satisfy my law, do not wholly please my ear, because they always occur in the same place. Nor does the suggestion of resemblance to the last line of an alcaic

Pauperem sine dote quaero

at all reconcile me to them. For (1) the resemblance is incomplete by a syllable, and an important one, (2) Latin and English are very different, (3) in the Latin the rhythm takes up a *precedent* suggestion, in the English it does not.



English prosody ever to use the hexameter itself seriously,<sup>1</sup> but he saw, for what it was really worth, that Puckish lob of prosodic spirit which lurks about it

*Did he fling himself down? who knows? for a vast speculation  
had failed*

is, of course, really a six-foot anapæstic with a single spondaic substitution. But if you cut off the last two words it will be just a Clough-hewn hexameter, dropping the two first and pronouncing "faile'd," a hexameter which has more semblance to the genuine thing than some of the Cloughnesses

I remember the time, for the roots of my hair were stir'd  
is catalectic *Evangeline* of spondaic type    Change it to

I remember the time, for the roots of my hair were *on end set*,  
and you might be following *Evangeline* herself in that exceedingly ill-planned stern-chase of *Gabriel* which ended in the hospital. These things form a by-study of great interest to the hexameter question. I do not know that in themselves they afford much prosodic delectation, except when poetry makes the poet break into such a thing as

And the flying gold of the ruined woodlands drove thro' the an,  
where you get the germ of the *Sigurd* metre, and a wonderful line to boot, or

The shining daffodil dead, and Orion low in his grave,  
which is more wonderful still

The five-foot lines of the finale are better, in fact Part III is as far above Part I prosodically as in other ways. Indeed, this form is very quaint and curious, and introduces us, if we will, to one of the prosodic mysteries. It has been and will be said constantly in talking of substitution, that it has to be most carefully guarded, so that there be no confusion of bases. How difficult this is, yet how it can be done by the skill of the poet, may be shown by comparing these five-foot lines with the author's

<sup>1</sup> For his playing with it as a *tour de force*, see the chapter on the subject, *infra*

five-foot iambs, especially when he took to copious trisyllabic equivalence there They approach very closely

It is time, O passionate heart and morbid eye,  
might be either, read as it is Substitute "'Tis time,"  
and everybody, seeing it by itself, would take it for a  
heroic line, and so with the next and others Yet read  
the whole, and the anapæstic staple is sun-clear<sup>1</sup>

The shorter anapæsts of the middle cantos, or fyttes,  
or whatever you like to call them, are generally better,  
but sometimes worse The regular but multiform lyrics,  
and the mixed metres that fill so much of the poem, show  
all the old prosodic mastery The most beautiful of all,  
"O that 'twere possible," is indeed certainly known to be a  
production of the golden age—a good deal anterior to the  
rest, but there is plenty more I suppose most people  
think the snatch "Did I hear it half in a doze" a slight  
thing, and so no doubt the Pope's messenger thought  
Giotto's performance with red colour quite indecently  
slight To me the rhythm<sup>2</sup> is yet another miracle, and  
I shall ask anybody, who will have the patience to note  
the extraordinary variety, and yet the perfect consonance

<sup>1</sup> Very beautiful is the expansion contrast, when misanthropy and madness  
have given way to resignation, of the single anapæstic trimeter given above  
into three fives

And the *shining daffodil dies*, and the *Charioteer*  
And starry Gemini hang like glorious crowns  
Over *Orion's grave* low down in the west

<sup>2</sup> Did I hear it half in a doze  
Long since, I know not where?  
Did I dream it an hour ago,  
When asleep in this arm-chair?  
Men were drinking together,  
Drinking and talking of me,  
"Well, if it prove a girl, the boy  
Will have plenty so let it be"  
Is it an echo of something  
Read with a boy's delight,  
Visitors nodding together  
In some Arabian night?  
Strange, that I hear two men,  
Somewhere, talking of me,  
"Well, if it prove a girl, my boy  
Will have plenty so let it be"

of it in detail with the atmosphere of the whole, whether it is not

As for the "Garden" song, I suppose the same people would call it hackneyed—a term which for me has no meaning except as applied to the persons who find things so. What wears is not the artist's art, which is imperishable, but the reader's or hearer's power of reception—it is he, not it, that is a hack. There are I do not know how many "settings" of this, but none of them has come anywhere near its own music reinforced with its own colour—the float, and sweep, and stoop, and sharp cross-flight of a covey of birds of paradise. Others are almost as well known, but there are few things finer in the poem than the irregularly rhymed decasyllables of the central rapture

Is that enchanted moan only the swell  
Of the long waves that roll in yonder bay?

"The Voyage," etc

The "minor" poems of the second period of Tennyson's poetic life require somewhat less notice, and the very large body of blank verse which he composed or published in it needs not a little. It is almost enough to say of the bulk of the former that he never lost his cunning in lyric to the very last—that in "Crossing the Bar," as in "Clairibel," you may find the prosodic sword of which you will be wise to say, "There is none like that give it me", while in not a few cases he hit upon distinct new schemes, or attained mastery in one where he had been less successful. The *Enoch Arden* collection of 1864 contained, besides its interesting metrical experiments, two specially perfect things, one, it would seem, old, the other certainly new—"The Voyage" and "In the Valley of Caunteretz." The rushing splendour of the former (*the* piece in English poetry, perhaps, for showing what "*celeris iambos*" meant)—the way in which line picks up line and stanza stanza—is a joy to see, while the latter, an exact opposite in the surging slowness of its movement, is one of the pieces which require no small study to be certain of their exact manufacture

The rhythm is hemistichic—there being throughout a very strong centre pause, on either side of which the cadence may be iambic *or* trochaic, while the hemistichs themselves may be catalectic or acatalectic, and trisyllabic feet are scarcely used. I have thought it worth while to scan it below, for the process does no despite to, but only brings out, the majesty of the surge<sup>1</sup>

In later books still, there is at least one practically new achievement of more than a special or individual kind. In his earlier work Tennyson—wonderful with the iamb and trochee, and the occasionally substituted anapæst—had not been very successful with this, the triple foot, unmixed or basic. He had let the "Dying Swan" swell into it magnificently, but the anapæst admixture in the "May Queen" is one of the worst managed points in that poem, and, as we have seen even in *Maud*, he must be purely lyrical with it if he is to be purely successful.

As not very unfrequently happens—and as, by a curious instance of the coincidence of general with particular development, had happened already in the history<sup>2</sup> of this special measure—it was in comic or partly comic matter that completely successful management of the continuous anapæst first came to him. The two "Northern Farmers" showed this mastery first, and he tried it in various inferior things, dialectic and literary, for a time, till it finally produced the absolute masterpieces of "The Revenge" and "Lucknow," and the "Voyage of Maeldune." It may be, at the stage we have reached, laid down with a certain confidence that

All | along | the val|ley, || stream | that flash|est white,  
 Deep|ening | thy voice | with || the deep|ening of | the night,  
 All | along | the val|ley, || where | thy wal|ters flow,  
 I walked | with one | I loved | two || and thir|ty years ago

The divisions indicate a trochaic alternative, which might easily be extended, and of course some people may object to the pauses at "with" and "two," putting them back a syllable. This will give a fine anapæstic substitution in "with the deep" and "two and thir." But I think iambic cadence in the first half, and trochaic in the second, gives the best scheme. We don't want "All among the Barley" to come in.

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter on it, vol. II p. 419 *seqq.*

The  
 anapæstics of  
 the *Ballads*

with a staple metre of this kind the poet has less to bring out its special qualities—that belongs to the more eccentric and elaborate measures—than to stamp its broad and solid surface with his own mark. I do not know where you will get exactly the same mark before as in

And the sun went down, and the stars came out, far over the  
summer sea,

OR IN

And ever above the topmost roof the banner of England blew

They are not quite the same, for the pause at “above” is far less than at “the sun went down,” which almost makes *three* divisions of the line—an arrangement singularly and almost uncannily varied in the gorgeous breathlessness of the shorter-lined “Maeldune,” where there is sometimes hardly any pause at all.<sup>1</sup>

The later  
blank verse

There are many other things that I should like to notice, but we must come to, and finish with, the later blank verse. It is difficult, even with the assistance of the *Life*, to be quite certain of the time when Tennyson attained his absolute zenith in this art. The summit is, I think, “twy-peaked,” as he would have said himself. The one peak is the opening of *Tithonus*, respecting which, often as I have read it, I have never, from first reading at first appearance to the present day, been able to persuade myself that the first ten lines, and especially the first four,<sup>2</sup> are not a regular stanza. In no case that

<sup>1</sup> As in

And high in the heaven above it there flickered a songless lark,

OR

Our voices were thinner and fainter than any flittermouse shriek,

OR

For a wild witch naked as heav'n stood on each of the loftiest capes

Another interesting contrast between “The Revenge” and “Maeldune” may be found in the ceaseless variation of line-length and foot-composition of the first, and the uniform sweep of the second.

<sup>2</sup> The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,  
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,  
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,  
And after many a summer dies the swan  
Me only cruel immortality  
Consumes. I wither slowly in thine arms,  
Here at the quiet limit of the world,

I know does blank verse get so near the effect of rhyme in time-beat and concatenation, if not in sound-echo. The other is the great description of Lancelot's voyage to Carbonek in the *The Holy Grail*, approached very near, though I think not quite reached, by the transfiguration of Galahad and his preliminary ride with Percevale. But scores of passages in the *Idylls*, in *Tiresias*, and in other poems, would have to be taken into consideration by any one who wants to get a really synoptic view of the matter. It is also perhaps not quite superfluous to warn those who are not of the Old Guard in this subject that the modern arrangement of the connected *Idylls* is extremely deceptive, inasmuch as you get work of very different periods arranged without the slightest regard to chronological order. Only by taking the original four—"Enid," "Vivien," "Elaine," and "Guinevere,"—and adding the others in the order in which they were published, considering, at the same time, the smaller things from "Tithonus" onwards, can the true procession and succession be observed.

The dramatic blank verse is perhaps rather a subject for some paragraph in an Interchapter or the Conclusion, in regard to the curious phenomena presented by the whole department to which it belongs, during the century. Although there are some fine passages in it—notably the "Green Tree" dream in *Harold*—there is not very much which could shake the equanimity with which some Tennysonian stalwarts would relinquish this part of the master's work. And it could not but contribute—perhaps more than a little—to the slight weakening of command which his latest examples show. It is one of the interesting things about blank verse that the *diable au corps* which is necessary to it is wont, like other devils in possession, to play tricks with the strongest men who half-possess and are half-possessed by him. Milton's

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A white-hair'd shadow, roaming like a dream  
 The ever silent spaces of the East,  
 Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn

For once, rhyme has nothing to add to this, the magic of the poet has already given all, or almost all, that it could give

familiar was a familiar with a bent one way towards stiffness and hardness, and he got that way a little too much in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson*, another way, towards temerarious substitution of trochees for iambs, which broke out even earlier in the "universal reproaches" and "bottomless pits." Shakespeare's angel—not a "black cherub" at all, but slightly masterful—was one who tended towards unbridled liberty, and showed it by approaches to excess of redundancy / Tennyson's tempter, in his attendant sprite, was a leaning towards an overdose of trisyllabic substitution, and in his latest days this also was a little too strong for him. A blank-verseman is nothing if he is not daring, and by constant daring he is apt to become rash.

It is thus, almost inevitably, in the direction of his greatest success that his greatest danger lies, and the various dangers almost all group themselves—from one side of grouping—under the head of mannerism. Tennyson's manners had been obvious from the first—they were partly indicated above,—and nothing but special grace will keep a strong manner from becoming mannerism. Even in the *Holy Grail*, and even in such a fine passage of it as the paragraph describing Camelot, epanaphora and epanorthosis "figure it" almost to the point of disfigurement. In *Balin and Balan* more perilous tricks are tried, such as the always dangerous final anapæst—

Than twenty Balins, Balan knight I have said,

where the danger is accentuated by the strong pause, after a lighter one, which seems to close an iambic rhythm, and then to break into a different one. Here, too, the cunningly woven paragraphs get too much intertwined with parenthesis—a thing admirable in prose, but always dangerous in verse, which has a parenthesis of its own<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Again, I do not think

Moaning "my violences, my violences!"

a safe line (though it is not, in its place, a bad one), because it, and other things exaggerating it since, will, in the inevitable revenges of Time, provoke return to the abominable apostrophation and decasyllabomania which we have seen dispelled

Of course there are any number of beautiful things here. A lovelier piece of verse than the short speech of Guinevere to Lancelot—

“Sweeter to me,” she said, “this garden rose  
Deep-hued and many-folded<sup>1</sup> sweeter still  
The wild-wood hyacinth and the bloom of May  
Prince, we have ridden before among the flowers  
In those fair days—”

I do not know, though it may owe part of its loveliness to the memory, so artfully suggested, of the forty years earlier verses which chronicle *how* they had “ridden before.” The effect of dramatic practice is also visible, I think, and not quite satisfactorily so, in this dialogue of Balin and Vivien

Thereat she suddenly laughed and shrill, anon  
Sighed all as suddenly. Said Balin to her,  
“Is this thy courtesy to mock me, ha?  
Hence<sup>1</sup> for I will not with thee.” Again she sighed

Most of all, perhaps, the change,<sup>1</sup> not for the better, is seen when the original “Vivien” is compared with the later version, or when the consummation of the old “Passing of Arthur” contrasts with the admirable, but less admirable, “Coming.” In the first case a tangle of broken verse-parenthesis, with somewhat excessive redundancy and trisyllabism, passes strangely into the sweet and stately measure of the earlier time. In the other, fine as is the passage of the dragon-ship and the sea-waif child, it certainly does not fully come up to the sustained magnificence of Excalibur and the Queens.

Yet here, as so often elsewhere, we must allow for experiment, and Tennyson never quenched his power, though he may sometimes have played tricks with it. And at the very last, after two full generations of poets trained—would they, nold they—by him, with at least four admirable representatives of the middle school yet surviving, with a respectable promise of more to come—who but he could have produced these lines of “St Telemachus”?

<sup>1</sup> The strong relief given to this is not, I think, a wholly pleasing result of the redistribution of the *Idylls* as an epic in *tableau*.



And, called, arose, and slowly plunging down  
 Thio' that disastrous glory, set his face  
 By waste and field and town of alien tongue,  
 Following a hundred sunsets, and the sphere  
 Of westward-wheeling stars, and every dawn  
 Struck from him his own shadow on to Rome

The claw of the lion still! We may say something more  
 of its general imprint later, but must now pass to the  
 other

Grand lion des plages de la mer

of English in the mid-nineteenth century

Browning  
 The common  
 mistake about  
 him

The Dick Minims of to-day—for the order of Minimites has largely increased in the last century and a half, though they wear their cords with a difference—have no doubt about the prosody of Browning. He is a rugged and incorrect versifier, contrasting remarkably with the precise and almost feminine correctness of Tennyson. Dick (*minimus* in another sense) says it in examination papers, and Dick *major* in reviews, and Dick *maximus* (thus and then most hopelessly minim) in books. Now a great many false things, by odd fate, were said of Mr Browning, both in the time when the British public had not liked him yet, and in the time when it had, but than this nothing was ever said falser. As a matter of fact Browning, though an audacious, is almost invariably a correct prosodist—he goes often to the very edge, but hardly ever over it, and when he chooses (which is not so extremely seldom) he can be “as smooth as smooth.” Not very seldom, likewise, especially in later days, when long-deferred popularity had “got into his head,” he set his affected eccentricity of tongue against his native justness of ear, and made an unnecessary to-do between them. But even then the ear generally won, in spite of the outrageous gesticulations of the other member.

And therefore, practically, Browning is not so much of a prosodic contrast to Tennyson as he is of a prosodic complement—an instance of the same bent working in slightly different ways. Like Tennyson, he enters into

the heritage of all English poetry as it had been re-discovered and partly applied by Coleridge and Shelley and Keats. Like Tennyson, he writes his greatest poetry by far in assorted samples of varied prosodic mode. He is fonder of quick measures, and better at them. He is more addicted to prosodic as to other "tumbling", but as your good acrobat never merely sprawls in gesture, so does Browning never merely sprawl in verse. The many-twinkling feet may be in the most unexpected places and tread the most complicated labyrinths, but you will generally find that no law of decent rhythm is broken by them.

Not merely, though partly, because we gave the principal treatment to Tennyson's blank verse last, we shall treat Browning's blank verse first. It represents even a larger proportion of his work, not merely after the "British public," by way of atonement for neglecting his best, had given him a bond to take anything (good or bad) that he gave it, but earlier. Its changes and its qualities are both extremely interesting, and though I could not produce a single piece<sup>1</sup> of Browning's in this medium which seems to me of his very best—though he is certainly far below his great contemporary as a blank-verseman—it illustrates the real, as distinguished from the fancied, contrast with Tennyson almost supremely.

His early  
blank verse  
*Pauline*

Tennyson, as we saw, began with a distinctly composite and obviously transitional form borrowed, though not slavishly, from two or three different originals, and not so much blended as alternately practised. Browning began with an imitation of a single model, very difficult to imitate, and passed almost at once into something else. Tennyson made the thing into one of its most specially perfect forms, though at some later times he strained its

<sup>1</sup> The chief exception, if any, is perhaps "Artemis Prologises", but this is in pretty obvious *falsetto*. That there are good specimens in "St Praxed's," "Cleon," etc., and that "O Lyric Love" is a fine burst I should not dream of denying, but what are these among so many? A very great poet, with a very great metre, will hardly fail now and then to achieve greatness. The text, and a further passage below, remain, I think, substantially true.

<sup>2</sup> I use this word here (as it might be used with advantage oftener than it is) in the proper sense of "as regards the species," not as="uncommonly."

legitimate characteristics dangerously. Browning turned it into a medium nearer prose in some ways than any verse we have, yet never technically indefensible as verse. His original model, as anybody may see<sup>1</sup> in *Pauline* after a few pages, was Shelley. "No *Alastor*, no *Pauline*," as far as verse goes, unless you admit some mysterious re-citation on the part of a boy who was admittedly an ardent student of the first exemplar. But the only thing that he retained of this first study was a certain "breathlessness" which is not absent in Shelley, but which assumes quite different form in Browning, and which is in fact the right name for his much mistaked of "~~obscurity~~" Browning is only obscure to those who take him as Thaumast did Panurge, and endeavour to discover some recondite meaning in his gesticulations. But these gesticulations (which are quite as often versicular as not) are only the result of his burning desire to get to the next thought, the next thing, the next hint, suggestion, inference, comment. All this haste transforms and transfuses itself into the fashion of his verse, especially of his blank verse, and it ultimately landed him in that apparently, but much more apparently than really, grotesque accumulation of tribrachs, and that welter of monosyllables, expletives, and sometimes mere gibberish, which was admirably and hardly excessively caricatured by "C S C" in "The Cock and the Bull," and "J K S" in the piece about the "Mc Society down at Cambridge"<sup>2</sup>. Oddly enough at first sight—less so, perhaps, when we remember the enjambers of the seventeenth century—it was not in blank verse that he first developed this pillar-to-post delivery, but in the couplets of *Sordello*, and he was duly punished for it by having to wait, like *Sordello* himself, outside the gate for a good many years. There is much less of

And couplet  
*Paracelsus*  
and *Sordello*

O' the thick

O' the work

<sup>1</sup> I remember seeing this, at once and unprompted, when the poem was first reprinted, and when I first read it, in 1868.

<sup>2</sup> It is curious that the "super parodies," as they may be called, of the *Heptalogia* (see below on Mr Swinburne) do not touch the blank verse

and similar things in *Paracelsus*, which is, as a matter of fact, much more "obscure" than *Sordello* itself. The blank verse here is still of the *Pauline* or Shelleyan type. The long intricate paragraphs are rarely full-stopped, but by no means freely equivalenced or frequently redundanded. In the immense dying speech of the hero—more than three hundred lines in length—there are not half a score redundances (excluding words like "heaven"), and scarcely, I think, more than half a dozen trisyllabic feet.

In his later work, where he was taking some liberties with the at length acquired popularity, and even in the middle, when he was conscious of having nearly attained it, he of course launched out. But neither in the

The later form  
not incorrect,

Worn patchwork your respectable fingers served  
To metamorphose somebody, yes I've earned,

any more than in the

Fol-lol-the-rido-liddle-iddle-ol

of "Sludge," nor in the

"Guilty" for the whim's sake! "Guilty" he somehow thinks of *The Ring and the Book* ("Guido," 408), will you find any difficulty in reducing the thing to a perfectly sound and satisfactory equivalence. You may be horrified at the number of fourpenny and threepenny pieces, almost at the "handful of brass,"<sup>1</sup> you get, instead of your expected five sixpences and shillings five, but there the sum is, all right. And what is more, it is your own fault if you can't "count the coin on the counter out" with a perfectly rhythmical cadence.

Let it be once more observed that of the propriety of presenting long trains of this verse, upholstered in a diction prosaic enough, for the most part, to bring Words-

<sup>1</sup> "Here! boy, take this handful of brass  
Across to the 'Goose and Gridiron' pass,  
Count the coin on the counter out,  
And bring me a quart of foaming stout."

There is no unpardonable irrelevance, I hope, in quoting these admirable anapests of poor Maginn's—as good an illustration, in the lighter way, of the prosodic improvements we are discussing as could be given.

worth himself to a sense of the peril of his theory, I say nothing here. I am merely insisting on the fact that, with exceptions which may exist in such an immense volume, but which I cannot remember and cannot, in repeated readings to refresh my memory, find, Browning always kept the norm—enlarged to utmost stretch, but never actually exceeded or broken; that he never went so near to breach or excess as Tennyson himself sometimes did latterly

but admitting  
the highest  
excellence with  
difficulty

On the other hand, it is almost self-evident that this volubility, however regularised, and this constant indulgence in the less central varieties of the norm, must prevent a poet from exhibiting his very best powers in the kind. There can hardly be a single good judge of verse who, asked to point out a limited number of Browning's best things, would include in them many proportionately—if indeed he included *any*—in blank verse. Not to do so with Tennyson would be ridiculous. To mention one interesting case only, it is practically impossible that, in such a loose and shifting form as Browning's, that marked variety and various marking of the pause, which is the great means of producing harmony, should result. The measure is well filled, but it is filled with sand that shifts, so that it is impossible to get the finest composition and relation of values out of it. One of the most effective means of producing supreme blank verse used by Shakespeare and Tennyson—less so, but still to some extent, by Milton—is the admixture of lines with no pause at all. But the headlong speed of Browning's lines presently obliterates whatever pauses there are, so that the pauseless or apparently pauseless line is, with him, the rule rather than the exception. Nor is there any form of verse in which the "beautiful word," the "ring on the stretched forefinger," produces so much poetic effect, or in which Tennyson himself uses it with such exquisite yet inevitable art. But Browning never stops to look for a beautiful word in his blank verse, or cares to hold it out, though sometimes one may come to him by chance, or by the natural kindness of beautiful things

For such a writer, indeed, the warning bell of rhyme, <sup>His octo-</sup> and the firm restrictions of lyric, are absolutely required <sup>syllables</sup> to bring out his beauty of form. And even the first is not sufficient by itself: the rush of his thought and phrase drowns it. We have seen how, in *Sordello*, the couplet is done to the likeness of blank verse. You hardly think of the rhyme at all. I protest that, well as I know both, I forget the rhyme in *Sordello* oftener and more completely than I ever do with the most "loose-legged" of the Carolines. But this happens only in decasyllabic couplet: he cannot get quite way enough on him in octosyllables to overpower the end-clang as he does in the bigger verse. There is not much danger of any one forgetting the rhyme in *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*.

Indeed, with characteristic whimsicalness, he takes good care that you shall *not*. As he must mind it, so shall you. His rhymes are never of that excruciating order which it pleased his wife to affect and defend before she was his wife (he helped to save her soul in that way at any rate). Dick and the other Minims talk nearly as much nonsense about Browning's rhymes as about his versification. There is nothing the matter with "examine it" and "Jane Lamb in it"--it is a very perfect gentle rhyme, though Spenser would have lopped the lady of her *h*. There is nothing more than permitted licence in "haunches stir" and "Manchester,"<sup>1</sup> and (considering the avowed comic liberty) very little in "ranunculus" and "Your uncle us"<sup>2</sup>. These things have really nothing in common with the appalling abominations which we shall have to chronicle in our next chapter. And Mrs Browning's crimes were, let it be remembered, always committed in serious verse, her husband's eccentricities were rarely so.

<sup>1</sup> For though you must not say either "hanches" or "Maunches" the sounds approximate near enough in "Ha" (compare "launch" with its forms "lanch" and "lance") and "Ma" (see App. on Rhyme).

<sup>2</sup> Blushing History, however, will hide "Aphrodight" for the delight of gods and men never, in the whole of Lemprière, did anything so improper as to rhyme to "delight". However, I am not sure that I do not prefer her to "Onlumpus" and the other later preposterousnesses. That single term at University College, London, had a terrible deal to answer for.

His salvation  
by lyric

No doubt, however, to be perfectly serious ourselves, his rhymes, like his diction, were ever so little provocative. In his management of strict lyric form there was no profaning of the mysteries, though, like almost every poet, he may sometimes have made an unfortunate experiment. That he had that Heaven-sent gift which Heaven had withdrawn somewhere about the time of the later Carolines, and vouchsafed again only with Chatterton and Blake, was shown, as early as the date of *Paracelsus*, in the beautiful

Heap cassia, sandal-buds and stripes  
Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,

where the coincidence with Tennyson's very little earlier work is astonishing, though there is a touch of Beddoes in it, and more than a reminiscence of Shelley. But for many years he would not indulge his genius in this its true way, or, at any rate, would not indulge an unworthy public with the fruits of it. And it was not till the golden bells rang, and the pomegranates shed their crimson pulp-fragments, that anybody, unless it were his private friends, could see what a lyric poet had all this time been wasting himself on lower kinds of poetry. Reinforced later by part of *Men and Women*, they were mostly collected together in one volume of the 1863 three-volume issue. And, as it was then that I myself made my acquaintance with most of them, I may perhaps be allowed to take them in the order of the volume which has been a companion for all but half a century—although still later issues have reverted to the oldest arrangement.

All the "Cavalier Tunes" are unimpeachable in any serious way, but I think the poet has only thoroughly mastered his form, and risen to the level of his great argument, in the chorus of "Give a Rouse," which is new and magnificent. In the opening piece<sup>1</sup> he has perhaps let his fancy for internal rhyme (not for the last time) seduce him to the jingly. But the full chorus of the

<sup>1</sup> Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,  
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing

second,<sup>1</sup> just referred to, makes the rafters ring in the mere silent reading of it, and the checks and loosings of dissyllabic and trisyllabic rhythm are unsurpassable

On the other hand, the principles of "The Lost Leader" are deplorable, and its assertions (as that "Shakespeare was for us") are sometimes demonstrably false, but its versification is glorious. It is curious that, though in quite different material, that power of the *bridle*—of the *curb*—which we have noted in the "King Charles!" is shown again. The piece would not be half what it is without the strong middle pauses of some lines and the alternating *ventre-à-terre* gallop of others. As it is, it may be coupled with "Prospice" as his greatest contribution to the fingering of the anapæstic base. The famous "Ride to Aix," though good, is much more commonplace as verse, and I would give twenty of it for one other "Through the Metidja."

Here there is not only an almost impudent but thoroughly successful experiment in monorhyme—nothing but the clang of the *i* will do—but an almost equally audacious and quite equally successful use of that "sunk" syllable which is justified—not as extra-metrical, nor even by the allowance of an extra-syllable at the middle, but as really final. The thing is virtually and schematically in single-foot lines

As I ride,  
As I ride,  
With a full heart  
For my guide

But for convenience' sake, for the speeding of the metronome and for the reinforcement of the clang-rhymes, the single feet are "coupled up."

One must be careful with these lyrics of Browning's. It is very difficult to pass over them, but we must certainly stop a moment on "Cristina." Here the poet was in

<sup>1</sup> King Charles! and who'll do him right now,  
King Charles! and who's ripe for fight now,  
Give a rouse here's in Hell's despite now,  
King Charles!

If the run of that does not "warm the liver," as Dirk Hatteraick says, it must be a white one.

Miscellaneous  
examples



two minds about his metre. Sometimes he printed it in continuous long lines, and sometimes in halves—the latter giving, to my ear, much the best adjustment<sup>1</sup> If you give as much pause in the long lines as the sense and rhythm both require, you practically make your halves, whether the printer has made them for you or not, and that being so, I think the printer had much better do it But, of course, this is a matter of taste The sway and swing of dactyl and trochee (I think that both must be given here, though the central anapæst is *possible*) in

So the year's | done with  
Love me for | ever,

"Love among  
the Ruins"

and the slow trochees by themselves of "A Woman's Last Word," are things quite decisive You would be justified, on hearing either and nothing more, in saying, "This is a lyric poet of the first rank" But they may yield for discussion, as almost everything else must, to "Love among the Ruins" Here we have much the same metre as "A Woman's Last Word," with the long lines extended so as to shock the mild shade of the author of *Lewesdon Hill* still further At least *I* have no doubt of the continuous trochee, though I believe some people scan the short lines as anapæsts, which, to me, gives a very jerky and unpleasant effect The way I prefer has a *nepenthe* virtue which is almost unparalleled It is not that the poem is "always afternoon" in atmosphere

Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires  
Up like fires,

and

In one year they sent a million fighters forth  
South and north,

---

<sup>1</sup> The reader may decide, if he does not exactly remember the poem, which are greater—the wholes or the halves—from this stanza

There are flashes struck from midnights,  
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,  
Whereby piled-up honours perish,  
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle—  
While just this or that poor impulse,  
Which for once had ply unstilled,  
Seems the sole work of a lifetime  
That away the rest have trifled

have pulse enough in them But they only throw up the quiet of the rest And the bold monosyllabic foot of the finale,<sup>1</sup> with the shudder- or at least shiver-pause between it and "heart," ushers in such a stanza as no English poet but might be proud to sign

If (to break order and bring the three crowned picces together) I have given a slight precedence to "Love among the Ruins" over "The Last Ride Together," it was in the strictest Pickwickian-prosodic sense. The "Romance"<sup>2</sup> is undoubtedly above the "Lyric,"<sup>3</sup> as it is above everything else of its author's (and most things of other people's), in combined poetic merit, but it may be exposed to an objection like Harpagon's—the cook has used up a great deal more money and material to make the dinner. There is more varied, and, if not deeper, more carefully exposed and vignettèd meaning the appeals are more complicated, and the measure matches them If the old story about cutting the three extra strings from the lyre have a just critical basis, this may count a very little against it—but only a very little This onzain<sup>4</sup> is most cunningly wrought, with a double device On the one side there is the peculiar arrangement of rhyme *aabbcddeec*, where the return of the *c* rhymes is not

Oh || heart | oh | blood that freezes, blood that burns |  
 Earth's returns  
 For whole centuries of folly, noise, and sin |  
 Shut them in  
 With their triumphs and their glories, and the rest ,  
 Love is best

<sup>2</sup> They originally appeared in the division respectively of "Dramatic Lyrics" and "Dramatic Romances"

<sup>3</sup> We must have a sample, but choice is difficult The best known of all (though by no means the best) will do

What hand and brain went ever paired ?  
 What heart alike conceived and dared ?  
 What act proved all its thought had been ?  
 What will but felt the fleshly screen ?  
 We ride | and I see | her bosom heave  
 There's many a crown for who can reach  
 Ten lines, a statesman's life in each |  
 The flag stuck on a heap of bones,  
 A soldier's doing | what atones ?  
 They scratch his name | on the Ab|bey stones  
 My ri|ding is bet|ter, by their leave

less or more important than the single triplet just before this returning *c*, and the bold *disturbance*, by the first *c*, of what had seemed like simple couplet. On the other there is the almost invariable limitation of the dimeters, of which the whole consists, to strict iambics, with the equally constant admission of anapæsts in the *c*-rhymed lines, and the last of the triplet. This alternation of steady ride and sudden curvet may be taken to be "rhythm in accordance with the subject" if any one likes, but the adaptation to the poet's *object* is far more subtle and admirable than that. There is, let it be remembered, no conversation, I believe the profane have observed (they certainly may) that if the lady "has not spoke so long," it was merely in accordance with the good old rule of not speaking till you are spoken to. The thing, after its short explanation-overture, is a meditation—uninterrupted, far-ranging, softly linked, but *circling* more or less round the same main point. For this he wants a stanza of some room, one that will enable him to give what De Quincey well called in another matter the "systole and diastole" of his thought. That chosen, especially with the *c* rhyme-line dividing it, supplies him exactly. Again, he wants a mode of prosodic *explosion*, a method of expressing the passing bursts of hope or despair, in and at the end of these several meditations, and the trisyllabic substitution gives him that. From the old (or rather middle-aged) uniformity nothing could easily have been got to give this minor explosion in such lines as

Who knows | *but the world* | may end to-night ?

or

I hoped | *she would love* | me here we ride

or

Now Hea|*ven and she* | are beyond this ride

Of course, as I have had so often to explain, the poet did not proceed on the principles of the ancient rhetoric and say, "I want to explode, give me an anapæst," or "I want circular thought, let's expand the old *rime couée*, and take in the bob-and-wheel system to some extent, and do it." But neither, when the lady lay for that moment on

his breast, did he say, "Let me bend back a little that she may lie more comfortably, and longer," nor, when her foot rested in his hand, did he say, "Let me roll back the radius, supinate the palmar fascia [*I hope this is right*] and contract the phalanges" But I am given to understand that he must have gone through all the latter processes, and I feel pretty sure that he went through the former

The third of the trinity, "In a Gondola," is, in contrast to the other two, a concerted piece of very various movements, and, as I read it for the *n*th time, I am not sure that it also is not the best. In the glorious opening<sup>1</sup> he recovers an almost Shelleyan intensity these seven lines are more like Shelley, in musical wave and ring, than anything else not his. And this quintessence returns in the great heroics and the final Alexandrine of the close. Between, the parts that are sung and the parts that are said are, both in the modern and the Elizabethan sense, paragon—at once supreme as regards others, and equal as regards themselves. The fluent but not insignificant octosyllable was perhaps Browning's best metrical cloth or joint to cut and come again at for these purposes. I do not know a finer example of its more regular form than

Oh<sup>1</sup> which were best? to roam or rest

More  
miscellanies

And the songs show wonderful range, passing as they do through "Past we glide" and the kisses of Moth and Bee to the bravura of "What are we two?"

I turn the brownish-purple volume backwards and forwards, rather aghast at the lengthening of this chapter but the variety of Browning's measures seems to insist on some detail. Here again his stuff has something like a staple

<sup>1</sup> I send my heart up to thee, all my heart,  
In this my singing  
For the stars help me, and the sea bears part,  
The very night is clinging  
Closer to Venice's streets, to leave one space  
Above me, whence thy face  
May light my joyous heart to thee, its dwelling-place

"Joyous" is perhaps weakish, and I am "no that sure" of "Venice's streets" else, could thought of man improve it?

which, not so observable throughout the early lyrics, appears in *Dramatis Personæ*, and continues when, later, he allowed his older admirers some oases of lyric to rest in while "the *Me Societies*" fervently followed him through the blank-verse desert. It is equivalenced iambic or equivalenced anapaestic arranged with considerable skill, so that, while there is the closest resemblance between the two forms, you never feel that doubt about the main base which has been pointed out as not quite absent in Coleridge the Restorer. Very skilful is the blend in the excellent "Lovers' Quarrel"<sup>1</sup>. Often you have pure anapaests, with substitution only for convenience and sometimes hardly at all, as in "Up at a Villa, Down in the City," "Saul," and others, too well known to need mention, and too many to admit of it. But he never completely deserts his trochees, and the long triplets of the "Toccata" give that rather uncanny foot opportunity to display all its wifery. Those persons (they "have much to learn," as the colonel said to the cornet when that young man observed that he didn't know champagne improved with keeping) who doubt the sovereign importance of the *line*, should look at "My Star"<sup>2</sup>. I would ask them to ask

<sup>1</sup> Oh, | what a dawn | of dry !  
 How the March | sun feels | like May !  
       All is blue | again  
       After last | night's rain,  
 And the South | dries the haw|thorn spray  
       On|ly, my Love's | away !  
 I'd as lief | that the blue | were grey

<sup>2</sup> All that I know  
       Of a certain star  
 Is, it can throw  
       (Like the angled spar)  
 Now a dart of red,  
       Now a dart of blue,  
 Till my friends have said  
       They would fain see, too,  
 My star that dartles the red and the blue  
 Then it stops like a bird, like a flower hangs failed  
       They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it  
 What matter to me if their star is a world?  
       Mine has opened its soul to me, therefore I love it

(There is, by the way, a prosodic and critical as well as an astronomical allegory here)

themselves why Browning divided the early lines and not the later?

"By the Fireside" adds another proof of the pervadingness in prosody of the *Garden of Cyrus*, as do "Two in the Campagna," and that most really puzzling piece in all Browning, "A Serenade at the Villa"<sup>1</sup> The examples are endless, but for "broken and cuttit" verse of thoroughly successful kind, I do not know where to look more confidently than to the almost crushing effect of the very short lines—broken explanations and quiet despair—of "In a Year"<sup>2</sup> and the varied *karole* of "Women and Roses" So too "The Boy and the Angel," and "Instans Tyrannus," and "After" would lose half—I should say all but the whole—of their beauty if they were in other measures, and "Mesmerism" reminds us again both of the magical and the conjugal powers of Five in a marvellously effective stanza<sup>3</sup> The three-foot anapaests, with double rhyme, of the "Glove" are curiously appropriate, and "The Englishman in Italy" will give any thoughtful person another excellent text for ruminating on the question of "split and run-on" in lines The popular "Pied Piper" could not help coming after Praed and Barham, but the "Flight of the Duchess" follows nobody I think the poem would have been better had it been shorter, but the measure, with its shortenings and lengthenings, is a very admirable thing Only three more from this division I must mention the stately shorts

<sup>1</sup> They are all *quintets* on monometer or dimeter base, differently substituted and trimmed

<sup>2</sup> Never a|ny more  
While I live  
Need I hope | to see | his face  
As before

(Trochees are *possible*, and perhaps, in some moods, preferable)

<sup>3</sup> Like the doors | of a cas|ket-shrine,  
See, on ei|ther side,  
Her two arms | divide  
Till the heart | betwixt | makes sign,  
Take | me, for I | am thine<sup>1</sup>

Let men and angels note the effect of the monosyllabic foot "take," with the triple emphasis it gathers from its concentration Scan such a piece by "accents" or "stresses" only, and "the heart betwixt" is gone Those who like the fleshless and heartless skeleton may take it, for it is theirs

"Childe  
Roland"

and longs of the "Grammarians' Funeral," the perfect intertwist of "Porphyria's Lover," and the remarkable measure of "Childe Roland" This last admirable thing, on which almost more nonsense has been talked than on anything else even of Browning's, and which the poet (perhaps in self-defence) is said to have declared to have no particular purpose, is to me a quite obvious and naturally supernatural *dream*—one has dreamt things not unlike it, though inferior, and might have dreamt things as good, if one's deserts had been greater and Eclypastere had been kind Now, though the character of dreams is infinite, one thing is common in them—the extraordinary *gravity* which accompanies their wildest and most preposterous accidents and combinations, as well as the apparent smoothness with which the topsy-turvy transitions are effected To render this you want a severe metre, but one admitting of no little variety The sixain *aabich*, with every line a regular decasyllable, provides this excellently, and as it is not a common form, it mixes the requisite strangeness with its sobriety There are points, both in the substance and in the manner, which, most distinctly remind one of Hood's "Haunted House" but Browning wants more scope, and does not want to concentrate the attention on a single idea And he has crusted on its steady outline every vagary of the bewitched scene, coloured it with all the rust of sulky sunset It may unluckily be true that you cannot set a slughorn to your lips—it being a thing<sup>1</sup> which cometh out of them, and does not set itself to them But if the article had really been obtainable of musical instrument-makers, and if there were anything analogous to it in prosody, as there certainly is to the varied forms of lyre and flute and trumpet, then I should say that Browning's stanza here is exactly the proper one for the purpose,—is a slughorn itself

*Dramatis  
Personæ*

There is no single book of Browning's which illustrates his prosodic powers and peculiarities so well as *Dramatis Personæ* If it does not contain anything equal to the

<sup>1</sup> "Slughorn" = "sloggorne" = *slogan* though somebody has fished out a Norfolk use of "slug horn" in cattle for a short slug shaped horn

First Three it contributes largely to the Thirty, and the proportion of masterpieces in it is quite remarkable. The poet's more serious blank verse in "A Death in the Desert," and his more fantastic in "Caliban upon Setebos" and "Mr Sludge," are not exemplified at the tedious and tyrannous length of the later exertions, while the choice of lyric, and of metres semi-lyrical, is, for so short a book, most remarkable and again *exemplary*.

Indeed, if we further confined ourselves to the very first poem, we should have to go from mid-nineteenth century (and just the end of the middle) to the later sixteenth to find so much variety. "James Lee" (I greatly prefer the original title, for the peccant James is really the subject throughout, and his wife is only the speaker<sup>1</sup>) starts with an example<sup>2</sup> of the very short lines, which suit so well for passion and disturbed passion—not the steady burning flame while even he never devised a better form for passionate *meditation* than the fretted outline of Part Two<sup>3</sup>. The anapæstics of Thrice<sup>4</sup> suit the attempted rally to cheerfulness, and the striking admixture of iambic substitution in Four<sup>5</sup> equally suits

<sup>1</sup> Besides, the new title, "James Lee's Wife," obliterates the echo of the title itself in the last two words—

When I should be dead of joy, *James Lee*?

<sup>2</sup> Ah, Love | but a day,  
And the world | has changed !  
The sun's | away,  
And the bud | estranged ,  
The wind | has dropped,  
And the sky's | deranged  
Sum|mer has stopped

<sup>3</sup> Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,  
Oak and pine ?  
Oh, for the ill half-understood,  
The dumb dead woe  
Long ago  
Befallen this bitter coast of France !  
Well, poor sailors took their chance  
I take mine

<sup>4</sup> The swallow has set her six young on the rail,  
And looks seaward, etc

<sup>5</sup> I will be quiet and talk with you,  
And reason why you are wrong  
You wanted my love—is that much true ?  
And so I did love, so I do  
What has come of it all along ?

"James Lee's  
Wife.]



the relapse that is to know no fresh recovery The broken half-rhythmical fragments of Five<sup>1</sup> stand for the attempts at self-consolation—at least philosophising And then in Six<sup>2</sup> a bold but successful effort is made to pick up the very measure and the very words of a quarter of a century earlier, and adapt them to altered spirit and circumstance And here you get one of the summits of the book prosodically The early verse had nothing of the solemn sweep of the passage beginning—

Nothing can be as it has been before,

and ending in—literally “sinking to”—

On all he'd sink to save

I seem to remember that the remnant of the Canaanites, in the high and strong places of Jebus, objected to the “graving on its soul's hands' palms” of anything, however wise, or fair, or good It was like them But let it be lawful for *us* to point out how the accumulation of strong monosyllables<sup>3</sup> itself graves the phrase and stimulates the effort Seven and Eight have simpler measures,<sup>4</sup> old and plain, like the resignation that they express, and then the *coda* with its recurrence of swing<sup>5</sup> punctuates the emotion of the close

<sup>1</sup> I leaned on the turf,  
I looked at a rock  
I left dry by the surf  
For the turf—to call it grass were to mock,  
Dead to the roots, so deep was done  
The work of the summer sun

<sup>2</sup> Nothing can be as it has been before  
Better, so call it, only not the same  
To draw one beauty into our heart's core  
And keep it changeless! such our clime,  
So answered—Never more!

<sup>3</sup> Only, for man, how bitter not to grave  
On his soul's hands' palms one fair, good, wise thing  
Just as he grasped it!

Observe the “blank verse phrase” here, not forgetting the rhyme—*panache*, or crown, to it

<sup>4</sup> *Seven* is plain decasyllables in a sixain *Eight* (which he lengthened later, not to its advantage), *Christabel* metre with rhyme-order at discretion

<sup>5</sup> In another anapaestic dimeter quintet of great beauty

"Gold Hair" continues this metre with a shortened fifth line "The Worst of It" has a very fine close,<sup>1</sup> and it is scarcely fair, though almost unavoidable, to remember that it was very soon succeeded by a much finer thing in the same key, Mr Swinburne's "Triumph of Time," which "puts it down," prosodically as otherwise It is certainly not improved, from our point of view, by one of Browning's curious experiments in that internal rhyme which is either a great embellishment or distinctly disfiguring Compare that almost earliest example which we were able to quote in our first volume—

Under mold hi lygeth cold,  
with  
On my speckled hide not you the pride,  
OI  
And journeyed my stage, and earned my wage

The curse of rhyme is jingle, and the curse has come upon it here

Some would say that it has come again in "Dis Aliter Visum," where the rhymes are brought close together at the end of the line—"I say, the day," "soft, aloft," etc—with a sometimes almost hiccuppy effect It may, however, be urged, on the other side, that there is more deliberate satire here, and that the satire, like the satyr, is always permitted to caper. The total effect is certainly good, it is curious, by the way, how close thought and expression come in places to "The Last Ride" "Too Late" goes with "The Worst of It" in more ways than one, but in "Abt Vogler" we come once more to a thing of consummate prosodic interest

At first, as you read it, you can, if your ears are "Abt Vogler" accustomed to classical metres, have no doubt about the scheme It is simply the regular elegiac couplet "accentually" rendered in English, with the abscission of the last syllable of the hexameter—a catalectic hexameter and a pentameter catalectic For the first four lines of the

<sup>1</sup> I knew you once but in Paradise,  
If we meet, I will pass, nor turn my face

first octave there is no doubt at all<sup>1</sup> But when you get on to the second half you are pulled up In the fifth and sixth lines the pentameter seems to have got to the first place, and the seventh is no more hexameter than the eighth is its proper companion<sup>2</sup> For a moment you may fancy that this was intended—that the poet meant octaves of two different parts But when you look at the other stanzas you will find that this is by no means the case Truncated elegiac cadence appears, disappears, reappears in the most bewildering fashion, till you recognise—sooner or later according to your prosodic experience—that it was only simulated cadence after all, a sort of leaf-insect rhythm, and that the whole thing (as marked by the dotted scansion lines below) is in six-foot anapaests, equivalenced, daringly but quite legitimately, with monosyllabic and dissyllabic feet It gives a curious and valuable side-light on that inevitable tendency of English dactylic metres to the anapaest at which we have glanced often, and on which we must dwell before very long But in itself it provides, especially for the famous tenth stanza,<sup>3</sup> a medium of marvellous capacity, and interesting in the highest degree to compare with Tennyson's anapaestic trimeters and seven-footers from *Maud* to *Maeldune*

"Rabbi Ben  
Ezra"

I suppose most people would agree that "Rabbi Ben Ezra" is the best poem in the book, and its measure is certainly not unworthy of it I have drawn attention to the effect of concluding lines greatly lengthened The original suggestion of this may have been part of the immense legacy of Spenser to English poetry, but it

<sup>1</sup> Would that the | struc ture | brave, the | man a fold | mu sic I | build,  
    Bid ding my | or gan o|bey, || call ing its | keys to their | work,  
    Clum ing each | slave of the | sound at a | touch, as when | So lo mon|  
        willed

Ar mies of | an gels that | soar, || le gions of | de mons that | lurk

<sup>2</sup> Man, brute, | reptile, | fly, || alien of | end and of | am,  
    Ad verse|each from the|oth er, | her ven-high | hell deep re|moved,—  
    Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable name,  
    And pile him a palace straight, to please the princess he loved

Note the alliteration

<sup>3</sup> "All we have willed or hoped," etc

was taken up by the seventeenth-century men and applied in the most various fashions. There is no doubt that it lay behind Dryden's use of the Alexandrine. Browning has used it here<sup>1</sup> with real mastery. The old *rime coule*, or romance-six, was a very effective rhyme-arrangement, but its monotonous recurrence of short line invited sing-song and jingle—as Chaucer showed “vengeably” and once for all in *Sir Thopas*. Here Browning shortens the *couplet* lines to sixes, lengthens line three to a full decasyllable, and when its correlate in the sixth comes, prolongs the lengthening to an Alexandrine. He thus attains at once proportion and variety, while the constant short rhymed couplets prevent stiffness, and the moderate scale of the whole stanza compensates the variety with a due balance of form-recurrence. Further, the extension suits, in a peculiar manner, the general scheme of the subject which it treats. This is, as it were, a running remonstrance with self, the doubts of the natural man countered with the secrets of the philosophers, and for this purpose the final Alexandrine serves as a clincher of force and weight unattainable otherwise.

Almost enough has been said of the considerable blank-verse constituents of the book. They make up nearly half of it, and in the contrast already made between the sobriety of “A Death in the Desert” and the apparent vagaries of “Caliban” and “Sludge,” the three things observe a regular progression. The “Death” has, as it ought to have, practically no “fanteegs” (is this the right spelling of that capital if unliterary word?), “Caliban” some, and “Sludge” many. On the whole, “Caliban” preserves the balance rather well, and shows the undoubted

<sup>1</sup> Take for example

Not that, amissing flowers,  
Youth sighed, “Which rose make ours,  
Which hily leave and then is best recall?”  
Not that, admiring stars,  
It yearned, “Nor Jove, nor Mars,  
Mine be some figured flame which *blinds*, *transcends* them all!”

Observe that he has smuggled his Delilah of adjacent internal rhyme in here, but it is an exception.

advantage, for satiric-dramatic use, of this chartered libertinage in verse

The other smaller pieces of *Dramatis Personæ* must be briefly treated, but cannot be merely dismissed in a group. In "Prospice"—the second general favourite, I suppose—the fingering of the anapæst is most noteworthy,—the way in which the foot is, so to speak—violating anatomy, but not metaphor,—alternately "forced on its haunches" by strong pause of word and sense and general rhythm, and then let out in full career<sup>1</sup>. The admirable lightness of "Youth and Art," half careless, half rueful, could not have been attained without audacious double rhymes. As for "A Likeness," I suppose that one must have a double dose of original sin to enjoy it, and to have enjoyed it from the first. I find that to this day virtuous persons are too often affected by its outrageous rhymes and the apparently (not really) disorderly sweep of its heel-kicking metre, very much as those other well-conducted people the "islanders of Rum-ti-Foo" were, or would have been, at the gymnastics of their bishop. However, I have never had any difficulty with it. It is Prosody in the ring, of course. Prosody going through flaming hoops, performing "acts" on five horses, and so forth. But there are worse places than the ring, though no doubt it should not be made a continuing city.

Nor is it, for the varied measures of the "Epilogue" take us far otherwhere. And if the solemn choric chant, the "godly joy and pious mirth," of the first piece, the stately heroic quatrains (solemn in another way) of the despairing second, and the brave triplets, "bating no jot of heart or hope" of the third, are not three pretty good diploma-pieces in prosody for a poet to lodge together and in half-a-dozen pages, I am greatly deceived.

Probably no more need be said of the blank verse of the later days from *The Ring and the Book* onwards

The later  
books

<sup>1</sup> Fear death? | to feel | the fog | in my throat,

For the jour|ney is done | and the sum|mit attained

The comparative popularity of this just-named book, combined (different as the two poets' styles were) with that of *The Earthly Paradise* at nearly the same time, shows that, when Time pleases, verse-narrative may recover its old place with the general, and this is of value as a general historical-prosodic observation. In detail it may be left, though there would be a certain interest (if men wrote now in folios, or would read them when written) in discussing, as a *quaestio quodlibetalis*, the reasons why such pieces as *The Inn Album* and *Red Cotton Nightcap Country* are more legible, in this curious hand-gallop (remember it is not a *false* gallop) of rocking-horse rhymelessness, than they would be in prose. I think it would not be difficult to establish the fact that the verse really does "cradle" the thought, and the reader, in turn

Some of the longer poems are, however, as is well known, more ambitious prosodically, and the chief of them is, beyond all doubt, *Fifine at the Fair*. <sup>*Fifine at the Fair*</sup> For this poem—over which the "*Me Societies*" have, I believe, wagged their paws very specially, and not always with approval—I have, I confess, a partiality which by no means extends to most of its fellows. And that partiality is, at least in great proportion, due to the metre. The singularly beautiful "Prologue" and "Epilogue"—each of them lyrically emancipated, as it were, from the motive of the main verse, and wrought into fugues of the most delightful dream-variety—may have something to do with this. But the charm of a beginning and an ending of a few score lines each will not carry one through a middle of between two and three thousand, formidable in individual bulk and provocative in individual constitution.

There was perhaps something of that rather feverish and feminine (let us, perhaps, prefer to borrow a famous word from Sir Toby and say "friginous") audacity, which distinguished Browning, in contrast to the calm virility of Tennyson's accomplished art, in the selection, dead in the teeth of the warning of the *Polyolbion*, of the

continuous Alexandrine for so long a poem. But in this case also, adventures were to the adventurous. It has already been noted how very characteristic of Browning's matter is the prevalence of "shock"—of the meeting of waves, of ups-and-downs and to-and-fro movements, and he has manipulated the Alexandrine so as to suit this tendency—nowhere more strongly manifested—after a fashion for which one can only make one's very best compliment to him. As we have formerly said, the metre almost insists upon a strong middle pause, or it gets out of hand altogether. But, with the strong middle pause, it risks a dreary monotony. Spenser, even though he does not use it continuously, sometimes succumbs to this, though seldom. Drayton does often, though by no means always. Browning has deliberately accepted the conditions and exaggerated them. The opening batch of four<sup>1</sup> are practically *cloven* down the middle—the antithesis of the Popian couplet is a mere crease to this cleavage, and though, of course, he has to run over the ditch sometimes, it is by no means often that he does it even in sense, and very seldom indeed that he does it in rhythm. This abrupt and *saccadé* fashion of writing may tease a little at first. I remember that, when the poem appeared, I felt it somewhat like Robinson Crusoe's goatskin waistcoat before he "eased the arm-holes." But the arm-holes very soon get eased, and it "trips and skips" with us like Elvire (or at least as Elvire ought to have done, for there is suspicion that she did not) in the most suitable and agreeable fashion. Perhaps you must have achieved Eidothee in order to find the secret of Proteus, and to accustom yourself to this partner. But then the humble purpose of this book is to give people a little assistance in the achievement of the prosodic Eidothee—at any rate to send them on to the quest of her.

For my part I think the prosodic daughter of the sea-

<sup>1</sup> O trip and skip, Elvire, Like husband and like wife, The tumbling troop arrayed, Drawn up and under arms,	Link arm in arm with me, together let us see the strollers on their stage, and ready to engage
---	---

god has been a very Ariadne to me in clewing me through the mazes of this unique production I do not find it so in the fifteneers of *La Saustaz*, which I never can read without a conviction that the measure is quite unsuitable for a long poem Nor can I take much delight in the octaves of *The Two Poets of Croisic*, which do not seem to me to attain the merits, or avoid the faults, of that difficult scheme

But the varieties of the later poems, though frequently interesting, become rather impossible Let us take a few only, from the time when, in *Pacchiarotto*, he returned, at least occasionally, to the smaller scale In that rather *outrécuidant* book especially, whether by a trick of Nemesis, the one female person who really understands irony, or intentionally, he uses "the banjo" more than any other instrument But even on the banjo there is the game and not-the-game to be played, and he generally plays the former The first of the "Pisgah-Sights"<sup>1</sup> has a curiously soothing and satisfactory rhythm, and it is not ill kept up in the second Indeed Browning has in few places better exemplified that higher suiting of sound to sense which is part of the nineteenth century's prosodic discoveries The couplets<sup>2</sup> of the really beautiful poem with the stupid and ugly title, neither Greek nor English which might have been called "Nympholept," or "Nymph-Struck," or a dozen other names, make one regret that Browning did not try them oftener Their rhythm is quite different from that of *Sordello*, though not from the still more beautiful close of "In a Gondola," and it has a strange resemblance to that of Tennyson's blank verse

<sup>1</sup> Over the ball of it,  
Peering and prying,  
How I see all of it,  
Life there, outlying !

Roughness and smoothness,  
Shine and defilement,  
Grace and uncouthness  
One reconciliation

<sup>2</sup> Still you stand, still you listen, still you smile !  
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,  
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft  
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft  
I could believe your moonbeam smile has passed  
The pallid limit



"St Martin's Summer,"<sup>1</sup> again (strange correspondence!), revives the old intricate *karoles* with no lack of charm, if with something of the autumnal sadness added, especially in the concluding three-syllabled lines with their far-off echo of "Love among the Ruins. The choruses of the *Agamemnon* are, of necessity, an almost total failure. I hardly know any greater sign of Mr Swinburne's natural and acquired sense of prosodic fitness than that he made his *Atalanta* choruses in ordinary English lyric rhythms—and yet he was not there translating. Only Tennyson in his "Lotos-Eaters" days could have achieved these things,<sup>2</sup> and I doubt whether even then the remembrance of the originals would not have made the English seem unequal. But the not very successful long verses (*v sup*) of *La Saisiaz* are preceded by a beautiful break of lyric, and the penultimate of the *Jocoseria* oasis was really a diamond of the desert. The magic of the first quintet there<sup>3</sup> is hard to beat. There was more sand for those who like sand-eating, but after many summers the swan died with a proper swan-song in *Asolando*. The sand had not quite run out, but there is much else, and it can hardly be chance that the end lines of the Epilogue-stanza, including the last line he printed, if not the last he wrote, were examples of those miniature masterpieces which we have noted more than once, the trochaic monometer catalectics, "Pity me," "Sleep to wake," and "There as here"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No protesting, dearest !  
 Hardly kisses even !  
 Don't we both know how it ends ?  
 How the greenest leaf turns serest ?  
 Bluest outbreak—blankest heaven ?  
 Lovers—friends ?

<sup>2</sup> He has actually transferred some touches, as in the "two handfuls of white dust," etc

<sup>3</sup> Never the time and the place  
 And the loved one all together !  
 This path—how soft to pace !  
 This May—what magic weather—  
 Where is the loved one's face ?

<sup>4</sup> Summary, as in Tennyson's case, is postponed to the Interchapter

## CHAPTER II

### THE MID-CENTURY MINORS

Classification—Mrs Browning—Her defects in form, especially in rhyme, and diction — The superiority of her strictly metrical powers — Examples, especially “The Rhyme of the Duchess May”—Matthew Arnold His peculiar position—His rhymeless attempts “The Strayed Reveller”—Early lyric and blank verse—“The Forsaken Merman” and “A Question”—“The Church of Brou” and “Instram and Iseult”—“Isolation”—*Meropi*—*Empedocles on Etna*—“The Scholar-Gipsy,” etc — Kingsley—Some general considerations—The “Spasmodics”—Some miscellaneous examples—Light verse Barham—Thackeray—Dramatic verse Retrospect—Miss Baillie and Talfourd—Tennyson and Browning again—Edward FitzGerald and the *Rubáiyát*

THE poets, lesser than Tennyson and Robert Browning, of the mid-nineteenth century, are numerous and interesting. At least two of them, and perhaps more than two, can only be called “minor” in the strictly literal and grammatical, not in the transferred and rather derogatory sense. But with these exceptions they must be, for us, rather examples of the prevailing principles which we have already indicated in their “priors” than special objects of prosodic study. Mrs Browning, Mr Arnold, with Kingsley and the so-called “Spasmodics,” present, individually or in group, the “majorities” of the minority. The others we must pass over in a way rapid, if not quite so summary as that in which Spenser groups the minor personages of form and fear in the “Masque of Cupid.”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was once called “a great poetess, and almost a great poet.” That there is no sneer in the word-play will be seen when we come to that

Her defects in  
form especially  
in rhyme.

greater poetess and really great poet, Christina Rossetti, and the comparison at the same time demonstrates that the fatal want of form which mars the elder singer has nothing necessarily to do with her sex—if such demonstration were not made entirely superfluous by the single name of Sappho. But Miss Barrett's form—Mrs Browning's became rather better—was certainly in many ways deplorable. She had no doubt to some extent caught the disease from her mistresses in verse—if not from Mrs Hemans, at any rate from "L E L", but she exhibited it in a degree with which neither of them—weaker as they both were in poetic spirit—is chargeable, and in respect of which Felicia, if not Letitia, is, as was allowed, almost blameless. Her ear for rhyme was probably the worst on record in the case of a person having any poetic power whatever. That she defended her atrocities in a well-known correspondence with R H Horne does not very much matter. Nearly all women, and a good many men, have a dislike to acknowledging that they are hopelessly and inexcusably wrong, while few men, and scarcely a woman, can harden their hearts as Wordsworth did and leave "defence" to well-meaning partisans. But in her case the torts were so hopeless, and so inexcusable, that they cannot have been due to accident, carelessness, or erroneous system, on the one side, or, on the other, as in "W W's" case, partly to pique, and partly to the exaggeration of a not unwholesome or unreasonable reaction from predecessors. They have been called "assonances" by persons who apparently do not know what an assonance is.<sup>1</sup> They sin against assonance almost, if not quite, as much as against consonance. In this place it is proper to give large allowance, and not to proscribe such rhymes as "-or" and "-ore," which, though by no means "things that you can recommend to a friend," may be excused in one, or even in an enemy, when there is some special reason for them. But there is no excuse for rhymes of "-a" and "-er," even though our ancestors did spell "hunter" "hunta",

<sup>1</sup> She *has* assonances, of course, but her worst things are not even assonant.

and the fact that a Scot like Gavin Douglas has "Palice" in the sixteenth century, does not excuse an English lady, born even as far north as Durham, within the nineteenth, for rhyming "palace" to "chalice" The Scots also (or their printers), then and later, used "v" for "w," still later "huz" for "us," but that would not justify her in adopting the style of Mr Samuel Weller Another rhyme of hers, "mountain" and "daunting," is so inexpressibly awful that we must merely mention it and pass by. No Spenserian eye-rhyme will excuse "Idyll" valued on the principle of "fol-de-riddle," or "pyramidal" with penultimate long To make sure that these horrid and long-known things are not unfair selections I dip in my usual *sortes* fashion, and at first try find "natures" and "features" (quite allowable, perhaps, in the eighteenth century, not in the nineteenth) Even the beautiful "Romaunt of Margret," where the mere selection of that form of the name is a stroke of prosodic genius, cannot—though imitation of "L E L" cuts its rhyme-allowance down to the absolute minimum—get itself through without such a miserable one as "faith" and "death"<sup>1</sup>

It is indeed needless to multiply instances of what and diction is notorious to every critic—of what can only be disregarded or denied by people who either have no ear at all, or are gifted with the possibly happy faculty of shutting their ears to discord in verse which expresses their sentiments or tickles their emotions Perhaps the crowning instance of all is in that strange welter of preposterous and genuine feeling—of ridiculous bombast and true poetic expression—"Lady Geraldine's Courtship"<sup>2</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> It may seem that this is a hypocritical objection But let the person who thinks so remember that the muddling of the values of these two words will spoil one of the most beautiful phrases in English for form and meaning, "Faithful unto death" "Faithful unto death"? "Faithful unto *Dayth*"? Fugh!

<sup>2</sup> If one may timidly urge scruples against the majesty of "The Poet and the Woodlouse" (and with what reluctance it is that I except against Mr Swinburne will be seen before long) it would be on the score of "gilding the lily" Frank Smedley's

\* As she tasked him, when she asked him, "Mr Johnson, is it well?" perhaps more truly rejoices the grave and chaste spirit, as a *parody*, though it is inferior as a poem

an example, by the way, which illustrates faults in diction almost as much as faults of rhyme

From my brain the soul-wings budded, waved a flame about my body,  
 Whence conventions coiled to ashes    I felt self-drawn out, as man,  
 From amalgamate false natures, and I saw the skies grow ruddy  
 With the deepening feet of angels, and I knew what spirits can

Now only conceive any one who had just used "budded" suggesting the pronunciation "buddy" for "body" at a few words' distance!

These things are horrible and heartrending. They make the process of reading Mrs Browning something like that of eating "with a raging tooth—a process of alternate expectation and agony. Nor is the diction much better than the rhyme. This, in some ways certainly, elect lady appears to have been congenitally destitute of all power of mental association, and you turn not in any pages from the "ruddy buddy budding with soul-wings" before you come to a "confluent kiss"!

If it is with difficulty, I say, that these things allow themselves to be conceived, it is with more difficulty still that, even by the unquestionable poetical merits that accompany them, they procure themselves to be pardoned. If somebody some day should—worse things have been done—attempt a blending of the *Divina Commedia* with the *Viage del Parnaso*, he will have to tax his ingenuity severely in devising proper purgatorial expiation for them. Under her husband's influence, however—which, as we have seen, was not really a bad though a very exceptionally constituted one in these respects,—she did improve a little, and you may read "The Great God Pan"<sup>1</sup> and most of its contemporaries without any fear of being—as to your ears at least—subjected to the fate of Marsyas.

The superiority  
 of her strictly  
 metrical  
 powers

If she had at any time been half so bad a metrist as she was in rhyme-mastery and word-picking, it would be almost impossible to read her at all, but fortunately this was not the case. She had, it has been said, inherited or adopted from her elder sisters a sort of general looseness which is felt even here sometimes, but she had a rarer

<sup>1</sup> Or, as its actual title goes, "A Musical Instrument"

suggestion and a more varied supply of rhythm than they had, even as she had a greater general poetical gift. In the early poems this rhythm, if rather undistinguished, is rarely incorrect, and the choruses of the *Scraphum* show that she had read Shelley at least not without profit. Not a few of the early lyrics that accompany it exhibit the *misus* towards varied music with no little success, though this success is often minimised by the stinginess of rhyme noticed. The fact is, that in this respect as in all others—even, no doubt, the cacophonous rhymes to some extent—Mrs Browning's curse was *la fretta*—hurry, absence of selection and revision. A poetess of later date excused herself for not attempting elaborate forms often, because (I quote from memory) "a woman-singer's heart is too full of the burden of meaning for them." This fallacy was, I am afraid, at least partly based upon the practice and attitude of Mrs Browning.

But, once more, that practice and that attitude were <sup>Examples,</sup> certainly less licentious in sheer measure than outside of <sup>specially</sup> it, as she advanced in her career. This is true, with what <sup>The Rhyme</sup> ever limitations, as we have said, of "Margiet", it is true <sup>of the Duchess</sup> of "Isobel's Child". That easy-seeming *crux*, the couplet of trochaic sevens, is very well mastered in "Night and the Merry Man", and though it would not be difficult to pick a score of small holes in "Cowper's Grave," she has managed, on the whole, to inform the fiftener with a passionate wing-beat which is not commonplace.

How discord on the music fell, and darkness on the glory,  
is not any "*buddy's*" line

I do not know that the Shelleyan influence, though developed with more originality, is much more happily shown in the *Drama of Exile* than in the *Scraphum*, but the Lyrics, which, once again, gave a makeweight for it in 1844, fly much higher. The Sonnets, even before those *not* "from the Portuguese," have the right mixture of strength and steadiness in flight. For all the rococo romanticism of "The Lay of the Brown Rosary" the metres are well chosen and deftly worked out, and I

think I have spoken with sufficient enthusiasm of "The Rhyme of Sir Lancelot Bogle" to entitle me to admire that of the "Duchess May" as verse. For its matter, it is as full of absurdities as you like, and I never have quite known whether to dislike Mrs Browning or Octave Feuillet most, in respect of the death of the horses in this poem and in *Julia de Trévaur*. But this need not interfere with recognition of the adequacy of the metre. And I am bound to say that I think that adequacy very great and rather wonderful. I hate the dreadful "abeels" that in the churchyard grow. "Grey of blee" is to my eyes a ridiculous reminiscence-muddle of "bright of blee" and "grey as glass"<sup>1</sup>. But dismiss all this, let measure have its way, and if the effect of the refrain, of the internal rhyme, and of the peculiar last line does not make itself felt, I am sorry. If any worthy person does feel it, and is made uncomfortable by a remembrance of The Bogle, his discomfort can be chased away very easily. In the first place, half the merit of Aytoun's magnificent parody—as of all parodies, and of all ironies that keep two faces under one hood—is that there *is* the suggestion of the seriousness and the passion behind the burlesque mask. In the second place, let him observe that Aytoun, like a master as he was, has not kept the measure *exactly*. He has omitted the refrain, he has quite altered the constitution of the line he has substituted for it, he has got the burlesque effect very mainly by making the last line rhyme triply with the halves of the third, and he has made the "bob" something like an anapaest to give head-over-heels effect. There is no reason to prevent the admirer of either of these masterpieces from admiring the other, though it must be owned that Aytoun's, if the less original, is the more entire and perfect chrysolite of the two.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I do not, of course, mean that "blee" may not be generally used of "complexion," but that the loss of the alliteration robs the archaism of excuse.

<sup>2</sup> Two stanzas, one of the best in each, may be given.

There the castle stood up black with the red sun at its back—

*Toll sto eby—*

Like a sullen smouldering pyre with a top that flickers fire  
When the wind is on its track.

. . . . .

"Lady Geraldine" (*v. sup*) is not quite so unhappy in metre as in phrase, though the protracted trochaics rumble and roll with a rather monotonous voluminousness. But the "Vision of Poets"—which is nearly the worst of all in diction, and which, on the whole, is very inferior as a specimen of octosyllabic triplets to the "Two Voices"—has some fine passages of rhythm. By the time of "The Lost Bower" she had learnt that it does not do to seant and stint rhyme, and though with her, in this respect, the part of Lady Bountiful was exposed to dangers, it has counterbalancing advantages. The fifteneer, split twice and kept whole once, has no bad effect.<sup>1</sup>

But there surely never was an apothecary who so insisted on putting flies in the ointment! She will write a really pretty, though somewhat mawkish and verbose, "Lay of the Early Rose", and after straining the utmost possibilities of rhyme half a score of times, couple "high-way" and "*mīu*". Now there are several ways of pronouncing that dative, from the speculative value of "*mīching mallecho*" to the wise and tranquil acknowledgment of nescience in "my-hy", but out of none of them shall you get anything that comes nearer to "high-way" than the latest abomination of desolation that has been imported into London by Heaven knows what

"Thirty casks are nearly done, yet the revel's service begun,  
It were knightly sport and fun to strike in!"

"Nay, tarry till they come," quoth Naisi, "unto the rum—  
They are working at the mum,  
And the gin!"

Exception may be taken to the description of "And the gin" as "something like an anapest." But doubters may be asked to compare lines 3 and 5 throughout the poem, to observe that *continuous* trochaic will not suit 3 well at all, and lastly, to refer to what I have said of "Love among the Ruins," and shall say of Miss Veley's "Japanese Fan." *There*, and in other places of Browning (see on him *sub fin*), the full trochaic monometer catalectic is required for weight and slowness. *Here* Aytoun, shortening the first syllable, speeds it up, for serio comic effect, to something at least very near an anapest.

<sup>1</sup> I have lost the dream of Doing,  
And the other dream of Done,  
The first spring in the pursuing,  
The first pudge in the Begun,—

First recoil from incompleteness, in the face of what is won



loathsome dialect, "hy-why" She writes a really (if, again, rather a mawkishly) pathetic poem in "Bertha in the Lane," and, by way of making us like it, starts with the final triplet of her first verse as thus

Though the clock stands at the noon	= oo
I am weary I have sewn [soon],	= o
Sweet ! for thee a wedding-gown [goon]	= ou

The stanza forms of both of these, whenever you can get them free of these intolerable degradations, are distinctly happy So is that of "The House of Clouds" (where, by way of a "farthest," you get "on" rhymed to "tune"), and that of "Catarina to Camoens," where "burden" finds itself coupled with "disregarding" This latter word certainly seems to express the author's mood at the time, and so to satisfy at least one of the then contemporary criteria of poetry

Of the later pieces it is not needful to say much here They are all separated and transformed by the stronger and saner nature with which she had united hers But perhaps she lost something of her own, as well as gained much of his I do not find a "Duchess May" among these late things, either in its absurdity or in its spell, though, once more, she had never before attained such flawless music as in "A Musical Instrument" itself<sup>1</sup> We may moral on her in the Interchapter

Matthew  
Arnold  
His peculiar  
position

It would be impossible for the most cunning ingenuity, furnished with unwearied pains and plenary power, to devise a more perfect contrast to Mrs Browning than Mr Arnold Indeed (though, for reasons obvious, but here unnecessary to mention, he never, I think, makes any critical reference to her) I should imagine that her poetry, with that of the Spasmodics, was his real substance

<sup>1</sup> Sweet, | sweet, | sweet, | O P in !  
 Pier|cing sweet | by the riv|er !  
 Blind|ing sweet, | O great | god Pan !  
 The sun | on the hill | forgot | to die,  
 And the lilies revived, | and the drag|on-fly  
 Came back | to dream | on the riv|er

I hope it is not necessary to add the exquisite final stanza— her very highest attainment, perhaps, in poetry

of recoil—very much more than Tennyson's, which he explicitly denounced, but implicitly in many ways followed. With her everything was undisciplined, emotional, gushing, and at least too many things were slatternly, not to say slovenly. With him everything was deliberate and (to the best of his judgment) disciplined, and it is certain that if there are any slips, they are slips of oversight, or definite theory, or deficient power, not of mere recklessness or ignorance. We are told, indeed, that he took more trouble about his prose than about his verse, and it is quite believable. But the result was not slovenliness: it was only absence of that rather finikin mannerism which latterly marred the real elegance of his earlier style in the other harmony. He could not, and he did not, escape the general tendencies of his generation. That he has left no long poem may be partly, but cannot be wholly, due to his avocations from poetry, and that he has in his earlier work, as in the "Church of Brou," constantly varied his metres is an unfailing tell-tale. That he started with unrhymed broken verse, and much later championed the English hexameter, may, or may not, speak unfavourably of his prosodic taste and judgment, but it at any rate shows that his mind was exercised on the subject. Nobody—at least nobody of his cultivation and character—ever broke the serried staves of the phalanx of blank verse into firewood, or attempted the forcing of the most beautiful circles into the ugliest squares, except of malice aforethought. Yet it is at least remarkable that, except in the hexameter point, his wide-ranging criticism seldom or never touches prosodic questions. It is by his practice, almost solely, that we can here judge him.

For his hexameters the common dock awaits him; the other cause may be called on at once. The experiment of "The Strayed Reveller" was probably induced, partly by following of German, partly by the pseudo-classical dislike of rhyme, but mainly, no doubt, by that caprice, that desire "to be different," which (let him denounce it as he would) was quite as evident in Mr

His rhymeless  
attempts  
"The Strayed  
Reveller."

Arnold as in any other chuld of his time There are nice things in the poem, but its vehiele is fatally exposed to the process of "taking out the linepins," if indeed it has any It is probable that Mr Arnold, like most young Liberals of his time and since, despised Southey, but Southey's prefatory remarks to *Thalaba* would have saved him from the error into which he falls here to a quite ludicrous extent I have known Heine's *Nordsee* almost by heart for all but fifty years, but I never feel or felt inclined to read it as blank verse, and, what is more, it is almost impossible to do so Even when he wrote a line like

Und durch die schwarze Wolkenwand,

which gives treacherous invitation to an opening iambus in the next line, the cunning poet avoids the snare, and continues with

Zuckt der zackige Wetterstrahl,

which leads the ear off in quite a different direction A *full* line you may sometimes find, such as

Auch dich erkenn' ich, auch dich, Aphrodite

But this does not matter at all, for *in its neighbourhood* it does not in the least give a genial blank-verse tone From this tone, as the examples given below will show, Mr Arnold could not escape.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Ever new magic!  
Hast thou then lured hither,  
[Wonderful Goddess, by thy art,  
The young], [languid eyed Ampelus,  
Iacchus' darling—]

[They see the Indran  
Drifting, knife in hand,  
[His frail boat moor'd to  
A floating isle thick matted]  
[With large-leaved *and* low creeping melon-leaves,]  
[a] And the dark cucumber  
[He reaps, and stows them,  
Drifting—drifting,—round him,  
[Round his green harvest-plot,  
Flow the cool like waves,]  
[y] The mountains ring them

Here the first piece is three pure decasyllables, with redundancy, cut into five The second requires only the addition of the italicised "and" to make

The other early poems are mostly happier in their prosodic respects, though perhaps they show that their author would never be a specially prosodic poet. The finest of them—the Shakespeare sonnet—is fully up to the mark in this way, and in others he is much more than merely up to it. “Mycerinus” attains more than fairly that peculiar quality of the sixain which, as we saw, the unerring genius of Spenser discovered in the first poem of the *Kalendar*—a melancholy and somewhat monotonous majesty, which does not reach the plangency and splendour of rhyme-royal. But he leaves it, even in this poem, for blank verse, and does better there. For his blank verse is really fine, and in one or two passages, such as the famous close of “Sohrab and Rustum,” almost of the finest in its special class. But that class has the limitations of specialty. It is studied off Milton first of all, but lacks the “easements” which Milton gave himself, while retaining many of his mannerisms, and Arnold is uncertain with his paragiaphs. The first of the “Mycerinus” batch, with its very Tennysonian close—

Early lyric and  
blank verse

Splintered the silver arrows of the moon,

is fully adequate, and so is the short *coda*. But the second tails off flatly. The “Sohrab” close is, again, redolent of Tennyson, as are many things throughout. In “Balder Dead” (which perhaps for that reason has been the subject, I believe, of coterie adoration) he seems to have tried to adopt a more original form, classicalised in phraseology after a different pattern from Milton’s. It does not seem to me very successful. Indeed, in all but the finest passages of this blank verse there is a kind of plaster-model feeling. He uses few trisyllabic feet, and probably meant those he does use to be slurred. In short, he is a little stiff at these numbers.

For neither rapidity nor flexibility of movement was ever

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it a complete blank verse passage with two shortened lines or half lines, *x* and *y*, of the kind common in Shakespeare. The poem is crammed with shorter stanza-pieces of the same kind. And it is perhaps desirable to point out that it does not matter whether their occurrence was conscious or inadvertent.

"The  
Forsaken  
Merman" and  
"A Question

Mr Arnold's forte, it is much if, in a celebrated example, he attains to a graceful undulation. This is, of course, "The Forsaken Merman," which I am entirely unable to despise, though I believe it is a mark of being a superior person to do so. Poetically it seems to me a beautiful thing, and prosodically the numerous variations from iamb to trochee and anapaest—even, as some would say (and perhaps they have a more plausible case here than in most other places), amphibrach—appear to me to be managed always satisfactorily and sometimes consummately. He got it from Byron,<sup>1</sup> I suppose, this rocking-horse movement (as it is profanely termed) of

The hoarse wind | blows colder,  
Lights shine in | the town

But the way in which these verses half-rise, half-sink, through various motions to a calmer tone, till they end sadly in

She left lone|ly for ev|er  
The kings | of the sea,<sup>2</sup>

gives me the prosodic thrill that I want. If anybody cannot light on this box he must "seek another," as the German landlord, successively immortalised by Erasmus, Scott, and Reade, inhospitably, but after all quite logically, had it of his inn.

There is another piece which is not prosodic "common form," and which I like very much, and that is "A Question To Fausta." It can be scanned well enough with simple iambic and trochaic alternation, but it suggests, as other nineteenth-century poems have been allowed here to suggest, a sort of whimsical syzygy into

<sup>1</sup> *V. sup.* p. 97, *note*. But it may have been from Church's song in *Egmont*.

<sup>2</sup> The comparison of these two couplets should suffice, I think, to show that the measure is really not amphibrachic, but anapaestic. But let us have the whole penultimate stanza in this latter scansion.

Come away,   away chil dren,	We shall see,   while above   us
Come chil dren, come down	The waves   roll and whirl,
The hoarse   wind blows cold er,	A ceil ing of am ber,
Lights shine   in the town	A pave ment of pearl
She will start   from her slum ber	Singing "Here   come a mor tal
When gusts   shake the door,	But faith less was she
She will hear   the winds howl ing,	And alone   dwell for ev er
Will hear   the waves roar	The kings   of the sea "

four-syllable feet, or trisyllabics with two longs. At least the opening couplets of the two first stanzas indicate special stress—a sort of “double-longing” process—in “comes,” “ebbs,” “dawn,” “smile,” and seem to gather round them the comparatively weaker though not absolutely weak syllables “joy,” “and goes,” “hope,” “and flows,” etc. But it must be admitted that this appearance as of pæons or even epitrites does not work so well with the third,<sup>1</sup> and it is possibly a mere phantasm.

Reference has been made to the remarkable and tell-tale influence of the *Zeitgeist* on the variations of metre of the “Church of Biou”—variations which are repeated on a different and larger scale in the extremely interesting “Tristram and Iseult.” The “Church” opens with some of the cheapest and most insignificant modern ballad metre, with double unrhymed endings to lines one and three—stuff worthy of Mickle, or the Della Cruscans, or the weaker early Romantics. The second part has a more complicated and manlier stanza. And then in the third you have some exceedingly fine heroic couplets, not in the least eighteenth-century in character, but on the other hand, though fairly enjambed, not at all Keatsian. Suspending further comment on this, let us turn to “Tristram and Iseult.” It opens with a decasyllabic sixain split into conversation, which passes on to *Christabel* metre of no bad kind, occasionally interrupted by decasyllabic couplets from the wounded knight. This part ends suddenly with two of the best anapaestic lines in the English language

What voices are these in the clear night air?  
What lights in the court? what steps on the stair?

But in the second part, when “Iseult of Ireland”

<sup>1</sup> Joy comes | and goes, hope ebbs | and flows  
Like the wave

Dreams dawn | and fly, friends smile | and die  
Like spring flowers

But

We count | the hours <sup>1</sup> | These dreams | of ours  
suggests nothing except the ordinary rhythm

“The Church  
of Biou” and  
“Tristram  
and Iseult”

appears, the metre changes to a quatrain of trochaic decasyllables with the odd lines redundanced but not rhymed. It is not very good,<sup>1</sup> and one is glad when the *Christabel* returns. Yet, once more, it is the third part that bears the bell prosodically, and, once more, it is with heroic couplet. Here, however, he has made a further stride, and in coming nearer to Keats has anticipated almost the very form that Mr William Morris, a few years later, was to employ so admirably in *Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*. And this, too, is admirable—fluent, but not deliquescent, varied, but not (to me) wavering, excellent in bulk for narrative, delectable in detail as poetry. Why he never took up this capital medium again is one of the mysteries of poetical and literary history. Certainly a page of it contains more literature than all *Literature and Dogma*, and is better for culture of the spirit than *Culture and Anarchy* extended to half-a-dozen volumes.

"Isolation"

The main lesson of the miscellaneous lyrics is the old one—the variety of the tune, the adequacy and scholarship of the individual, but here and there a certain want of the inevitable and of original inspiration. You will never be teased by nonsense, but you will rarely be gratified by special music. This is not more true of the octosyllables of "Resignation" (an excellent thing poetically) than of the varied lyrics of that curious miscellany "Switzerland," which really ought to be reconstituted, or rather constituted, as a whole. Only once, perhaps, in the

<sup>1</sup> The identity in diversity of the fault here with that in Part I. of "The Church of Hrou" is very striking.

Down the Savoy valleys sounding,  
Echoing round the castle old,  
'Mid the distant mountain chalets  
Hark! what bell for church is toll'd?

Raise the light, my page! that I may see her —  
Thou art come at last, then, haughty Queen!  
Long I've waited, long I've fought my fever,  
Late thou comest, cruel thou hast been

But at any rate he did not, as Mrs Browning would have done, think that "see her" and "fever" rhymed, or put "valleys" last to make a pleasant pair with "chalets."

one very short thing of Mr Arnold's (besides, perhaps, the Shakespeare sonnet) that I can call magnificent, "To Marguerite—Continued,"<sup>1</sup> is the Marriage of Form and Matter absolutely consummated and consummate. The incipient hurry of the quatrains—the check even in the second stanza where the sense seems to go on, but where, as closer consideration is given, it will be found that the *scene* is changed, the reunion of the completing couplet, and the increasing weight of each final line, culminating in

The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea

—there is no mistake about all this metrically. And fortunately the abiding scholarship prevents its quietly passionate sentiment from being interfered with by even the slightest false note of diction.<sup>2</sup>

In the unrhymed choruses of *Merope* he escapes the *Merope tamen usque recurrit* of the decasyllable rather better than in the "Strayed Reveller," but by no means wholly, and they must be pronounced rather uninspired and uninspiring. Such things as

O heritage of Neleus,  
Ill-kept by his infirm heirs !  
O kingdom of Messene !  
Of rich soil, chosen by craft,  
Possessed in hatred, lost in blood,

<sup>1</sup> Earlier and better called "Isolation," a title later transferred to the foregoing piece.

<sup>2</sup> Well as it ought to be known, a couple of stanzas should perhaps be given to illustrate the rather minute prosodic criticism made above.

{ Yes ! in the sea of life enisled,  
{ With echoing straits between us thrown,  
{ Dotting the shoreless watery wild,  
{ We mortal millions live *alone*  
{ The islands feel the encircling flow,  
{ And then their endless bounds they know  
{ But when the moon their hollows lights,  
{ And they are swept by balms of spring,  
{ And in their glens, on starry nights,  
{ The nightingales divinely sing,  
{ And lovely notes, from shore to shore,  
{ Across the sounds and channels pour—

The third is weaker—in fact weak almost to the point of flaccidity, but the fourth mends all with the plunging wave thunder of "unplumb'd—salt—estranging."



are sheer prose—prose of a rhythmical character no doubt, and adopting poetic diction in some respects of order and phrasing, but not English verse at all, and not in the least made so by fact of their more or less exact correspondence with another piece of the same rhythm more or less on the opposite page. What might happen with musical assistance need not be speculated on. I believe it may be said with fair assurance that the English ear is not very eager to detect such a correspondence, for the simple reason, not that it is dull, but that the English language, without rhyme and without more marked returns or tallies of rhythmical arrangement, will not retain an individual form long enough, if indeed it will gladly receive such a form as that just quoted even for an instant<sup>1</sup>

*Empedocles on  
Etna*

Very different is the far earlier and happier *Empedocles on Etna*. This piece, which, except some fragments, he left in limbo for many years, in obedience to an arbitrary critical whim,<sup>2</sup> is quite a good composition prosodically. The opening blank verse is crisp and fresh, if not distinctly out of the common, and the lyrics are sometimes really beautiful. The daughter of Cupid and Psyche, volatile as she is, never deserts the reader in the *Lyridas*-measure of

The track winds down to the clean stream

after its first couplet, or in the following octosyllables. The graver measure<sup>3</sup> of Empedocles' recitative is not *always* too grave for her, as here<sup>4</sup>. And Callicles' re-

<sup>1</sup> For the reason indicated the anapestic parts are better, but scarcely good.

<sup>2</sup> I must interject a distinction. I do not mean that the famous doctrine of "inadequate action" (as we may call it for shortness) is a "whim" in itself, but as applied to poetry. It has never been neglected by the novelist, or by the dramatist for the theatre, save at his peril, though that peril has constantly been incurred, and has generally turned itself into perdition. But with action, poetry, as I use the word, has nothing *necessarily* to do, though, of course, if the poet *tries* to tell a story, he undergoes the liability of the story teller.

<sup>3</sup> There can be, I think, very little doubt that this measure was in Mr. Browning's mind when he devised the much greater but still not wholly dissimilar one of "Rabbi Ben Ezra" many years later. Oddly enough, too, the sentiments likewise agree, though Mr. Arnold meanwhile had turned renegade in this respect (cf. "Growing Old").

<sup>4</sup> In the very opening

The out spread world to span  
A cord the Gods first slung,

sumption with "Far, far, from here" seems to have been too much even for its father's stoicism, as he used to print it during the occultation of the bulk of the piece. Later the uglier rhymelessness reappears sometimes. But there are consolations, and when Empedocles (all except his patters, according to the wicked version of the story) has vanished, tired, from a tired earth, Callicles rescues rhymelessness by rhythm in those charming lines "Not here, O Apollo," etc, on which the only blot is "hotness." "Hotness" is a vile word, but the rest of the song is very far from vile.

There are many other things of Mr Arnold's which I should like to mention—the beautiful early cadence of "Requiescat", the quaint, but appropriate and effective, monotone of the "New Sirens", the stately symphony of sound and sense in "Dover Beach", the humorous adequacy of "Bacchanalia", the strong passion which, as we have seen it do so often in other forms, fuses the ineffectual and ungainly rhymeless Skeltonics into something grave and noble in "Rugby Chapel" and "Heme's Grave". But there are three which must supply a conclusion not quite so lightly detailed—the "Scholar-Gipsy," "Thyrsis," and "Westminster Abbey"—poems far separated in date, appealing to very different sympathies in subject, but showing in the poet, alike at the outset, the middle, and the close, or almost the close, of his poetic career, an admirable artist. He certainly had one of his own "heaven-sent moments" when he chose the measure for "The Scholar-Gipsy." He wanted a stanza of something like the capacity of the Spenserian, but of a different tone, and this was p-waisted or dice-boxed

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And then the soul of man  
 Flies, like a mirror, hung,  
 And bade the winds through space impel the gusty toy  
 Hither and thither spins  
 The wind-borne, mirroring soul,  
 A thousand glimpses wins,  
 And never sees a whole,

Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ  
 It is very long and it is rather unequal, descending to mere prosiness not seldom, but its capacities remain

dixain is exactly the thing<sup>1</sup> There are really few pieces, out of the topmost masters, in which matter and form seem more perfectly wedded On the other hand, in "Thyrsis" he might have used the Spenserian if it had suited him (which, I think, it would not have done), as far as suiting the subject was concerned But *Adonais* barred that, and there was strong argument for continuing the metre from what practically was the earlier part, and he has moulded it to its slightly changed purpose quite unerringly

In "Westminster Abbey" he kept the number of the lines, but largely altered their outline The conception of the stanza cannot have been without a sort of "motive" hint from Milton's "Nativity", but he guides it skilfully off into quite a different total effect And, once more, this effect could not better have suited, I do not say its subject, but its purpose Few nobler examples of verse, in all but the highest kind, were written in the last quarter of the nineteenth century than that given below,<sup>2</sup> few in the midst of it than the earlier companion<sup>3</sup>

Kingsley

Once more, the general characterisation of Mr Arnold's verse will be better kept, with that of the verse of Tennyson and the Brownings, to the Interchapter, and we must proceed to a more summary survey of the minorities of

<sup>1</sup> Still nursing the unconquerable hope,  
Still clutching the inviolable shade,  
With a free, onward impulse brushing through,  
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—  
Far on the forest skirts, where none pursue,  
On some mild pastoral slope  
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales  
Freshen thy flowers as in former years  
With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,  
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales !

<sup>2</sup> The Minster's outlined mass  
Rose dim from the morass,  
And thitherward the stranger took his way  
Lo, on a sudden all the pile is bright !  
Nave, choir, and transept glorified with light,  
While tongues of fire on coign and carving play !  
And heavenly odours fan  
Come streaming with the floods of glory in,  
And carols float along the happy air,  
As if the reign of joy did now begin

<sup>3</sup> Given above in Note I

the period. Some of them are, as has been said, minorities only in a sort of accidental fashion, and one of the most remarkable of these is Charles Kingsley. I have known some people uplift the eye of astonishment, or put out the lip of scorn, at praise of Kingsley as a poet. But these people were mostly negligible, either in respect of general competence, or by reason of the curious antagonism on non-literary points which he contrived to excite in very different quarters. What is more surprising, I have known persons, who rank as men of letters, to inform the public, as of something not common knowledge, and perhaps not familiar to themselves, that he wrote verses. On the other hand, catholic criticism need have no doubt about calling Kingsley a poet *sans phrase*, though one who produced extraordinarily little poetry. The fact is that he had far too many irons in the fire, and kept them going far too busily. His novels would be an immense loss, and need not have interfered much, his sermons, which are sometimes excellent, were duty-work, and need not have interfered either, as witness Donne and others. But his early wanderings after the will-o'-the-wisps of Christian Socialism (except that he caught a poem or two from it), and his history, and his criticism, and his controversies, and his courtiership, and half-a-dozen other things, got in the way of the Muse in a very provoking fashion, all the more so that for most of these functions he was utterly disqualified.

But even these things did not wholly choke the good seed that the patient goddess sowed, and from "The Poacher's Widow" to "Lorraine, Lorree"<sup>1</sup> it gave delightful flowers. Of the hexametrical character of *Andromeda* we are bound to speak elsewhere, its character as a rushing body of various and yet graceful English verse can escape nobody who has senses to appreciate such an

<sup>1</sup> This singular and charming thing—his last and one of his best—is an absolutely palmary example of the *avrápεια* of true prosodic music.

Are you ready for your steeplechase, Lorraine, Lorraine, Lorree? with the rhythm rocking, never identically but always harmoniously, to the "Barum, barium, barce" refrain, is a "windfall of the muses" if ever there was one. It also exhibits the peculiar charm of mono-rhyme.

entity. The quaint pathetic partisan pamphlet of *The Saint's Tragedy* has nothing to fear from prosodic censorship, and the proportion of the smaller pieces which must be crowned by any competent prosodic Academy, if presented to it, is extraordinarily large. I do not know that the famous "Sands of Dee" is one of these, it rather lays itself out for music, instead of indicating, like the swan-song above cited, the music that is to come to it if it likes. Prosodically speaking, I could be content never, in Calverley's words, to have "heard imaginary Maries Call fictitious cattle home." But it is not so with "The Three Fishers," which wants no music at all, though it is not disfigured by its well-known setting, and is a wonderful confection in anapaests, fingered into a plangency which is rarely connected with that metre. The third familiarity, "The Starlings," stands between the two in relation to music, being written for it, but is much less dependent thereon than "The Sands of Dee." The use of trisyllabic feet here is very artful, and the lines are really line-pairs. I should like to dwell on "Dartside", and the "Dolcino" pieces, in spite of Dante and his commentators, have always given me a wrong-headed weakness for that heretic. The "Long-beard's Saga" is certainly the best of the rather bastard attempts to get sound-equivalent for the old short epic line, and "Swan Neck" is finely managed. In fact hardly a piece is prosodically commonplace. Where will you find more pleasantly rolling fourteeners than the "Isle of Avès"?<sup>1</sup> The blanks of "Sappho" undoubtedly owe something to "Ulysses," but they are about its best followers. And "Earl Haldane's Daughter," and the "Night Bird," and "The Dead Church" (which happened at that time to be particularly alive, though he would not know it), and the wonderful "Bad Squire," and the best things in the very early "Weird Lady" and "Red King" are all articles of choice. If this man was not a

<sup>1</sup> In strictness "The Last Buccaneer", but I call it as above to prevent confusion with Macaulay (*v. sup.* pp. 135-137). "The Bad Squire," *inf.*, is an *alias* of "The Poacher's Widow," *sup.* At its original appearance in *Yeast* he called it neither, but "A Rough Rhyme on a Rough Matter."

predestined verse-smith there seldom has been one. And then he went and exposed his poor bare legs to the arrows of pottering pedants, and tried to argue with John Henry Newman!

It is just at this point that the difficulty of selection, which will press on us in this and the corresponding chapter of the next book, begins to pinch sharply. There is a certain class of hasty thinker, apt to complain of detailed notice being withheld from contemporary, or nearly contemporary, minorities, while given to those—possibly, if not certainly, no better—of earlier times. To any one who thinks a little more slowly and closely, the justification—in fact the necessity—of this will very soon reveal itself. In regard to the farther past, Time has often selected and arranged for us, not in respect of popularity, for that matters little, but in respect of first exhibition of peculiarity and consequent exercise of influence. And, as a matter of fact, we have neglected here all but the more important representatives of schools such as the Metaphysical and the Popian. But there is yet another consideration affecting the admission of the minor mid-nineteenth century writers. The great prosodic lesson of the time—the variation and multiplication of metres—had been so thoroughly learnt and so extensively performed by the two leaders—Tennyson and Browning—that there was comparatively little left for others to do, either in the way of novelty, or in the way of what may be called invitation of reaction. We have seen that Matthew Arnold, though inclined to this latter process in general, is for the bulk of his work very distinctly polymetric, though some of his attempts, especially in rhymeless measures, are as little happy as they are new. And if we turn to the contemporary development most apart from Mr Arnold's, the so-called "Spasmodic"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have, I think, seen this term objected to as ephemeral and out of date. Now nothing that is good can ever be out of date, and it is a matter of the profoundest indifference whether what is not good is in date or out of it. The term "Spasmodic" was and is a good one, better, in fact, than its older fellow "Metaphysical." There have been, are, and doubtless will be Spasmodics whenever the Lord of Poetry has thought it, thinks it, or may

school, we shall find the same lesson taught in a different way

The "Spas-  
modies"

They do not often seem to have thought of going very far afield in metre or rhyme, in fact they could not go much further than Mrs Browning—who was a Spasmodic in petticoats—had gone already. It is true that they made it up in extravagance of thought, arrangement, and diction. The endless telescope of *Festus* airanged its interminable "draws" in blank verse neither very good nor very bad. Its author's lyrics are quite undistinguished. The unfortunate and rather amiable Jones—Jones the politician, not Jones the poet, Ernest, not Eben—who was so brutally treated in an English Bastille that he died twenty years afterwards, had no bad knack of fluent lyric verse, though he never attained the energy of Charles Mackay, or even of his senior, Ebenezer Elliott, or of his very disreputable though clever junior in Radical verse-making, Robert Brough. Even in the two real poets of the school, Alexander Smith and Sydney Dobell, something of the same general prosodic character (not badness, but indistinctness) is seen, though less in both of them and least in Dobell. Alexander Smith's best things are perhaps in blank verse,<sup>1</sup> undoubtedly Tennysonian as it is in spirit. His lyric was sometimes fresh and happy, as witness the "Barbara" song in "Horton"<sup>2</sup>

think it proper to afflict his heritage with this plague. And when the author of *Lucius* died, only the other day, he could have "settled the succession of the state" without much difficulty.

<sup>1</sup> Such as the passage which Kingsley pronounced "only exquisitely pretty."

The bridegroom sea  
Is toying with the shore, his wedded bride,  
And in the fulness of his marriage joy  
He decorates her tawny brow with shells,  
Retires a space to see how well she looks,  
Then, proud, runs up to kiss her

This "only" has always made me think of a comment once passed on that curious corrupt jingle of a refrain, *Hotum potum paradis tantum ferry-merry dictum domare*. "Paradis tantum? Why, what the — did the fellow want more?"

<sup>2</sup> On the Sabbath day,

Through the churchyard old and grey,  
Over the crisp and yellow leaves I held my rustling way,  
' And amid the words of mercy, falling on my soul like balms,

Others, like the blank verse, are perhaps too Tennysonian, but a large number of imitators have shown how easy it is not to be Tennysonian enough.

Still, Dobell could do better. Nobody of competence has ever had any doubt about "Keith of Ravelston," though there is really very little in it except the elf-struck echo of the refrain, which depends for almost its whole appeal on the strongly contrasted resonance of the four different vowels.<sup>1</sup>

Examples crowd on the memory, sometimes in an insistent and rather reproachful manner, to be met by the reminder that this is not a Book of Beauties. I mentioned Charles Mackay just now, and though he was apt to be theatrical and glib, there is no doubt about the stamp of his "Cholera Chant,"<sup>2</sup> a thing of which the nineteenth century gave as much the metre as the subject, and far superior in movement to the more frequently quoted "Oh, ye Tears." It is not merely an unusually lucky marriage of music, nor merely a universally appealing sentiment, which makes the merit of Milnes's "Strangers Yet." The mould of the metre has much to do with the success of that admirable piece of war-verse, Sir Francis Doyle's "Red Thread of Honour." "The other Jones"—the Eben one—is prosodically what he is poetically, not "a *great* perhaps," but a perhaps. A man who did not die till he was forty had, on the analogy of Shelley and Keats, plenty of time to show what was in him, but Jones only managed to show what might have been in him. Nevertheless he has an interest which is

<sup>1</sup>Mid the gorgeous storms of music, in the mellow organ calms,

<sup>2</sup>Mid the upward streaming prayers, and the rich and solemn psalms,  
I stood careless, Barbara!

<sup>1</sup> O Keith of Ravelston  
The sorrows of thy *lune*

<sup>2</sup> *Dense* on the stream the vapours lay,  
*Thick* as wool on the cold highway,  
*Spungy* and dim each lonely lamp  
*Shone* on the streets so dull and damp

I have italicised the opening syllables to draw attention to the extraordinary "high pressure" that the poet has got on them. He has practically made them monosyllabic feet with anapaests to follow, though the piece will scan—abacus fashion—as iambs.



Clough

not in dozens of men who have done better "The Hand," "Rain," "When the World is Burning," have in them prosodic germs of something which their author has not brought out, but which no other has. They are no echoes—they are embryos. Clough, who, like his friend and elegist, may be reprieved hexametrically, seems to me to demand, in virtue of his other verse, more than a stay of that judgment which has been rather rashly pronounced on him by some judges. You may fight as much as you like about his general type of character, in as well as out of literature, and you may (I do) disagree with most of his opinions. But I do not think that the man who could impress, on his mere verse, the rest and the struggle of sea-faring in "Qua Cursum Ventus", the quiet scorn of "The Latest Decalogue", the rise of tide and dawn in the two famous last stanzas of "Say not the struggle", and the wandering, restless quest of "Easter Day," was a contemptible artist. At least, in this long research of mine, and the longer readings which have led up to it, I have not found so many artists who could present these results, and I have found so many who could not.<sup>1</sup>

Light verse  
Barham

Most of the writers with whom we have been dealing in this chapter have been wholly, or almost wholly, serious. We must turn to some who—if not simply open to the charge (once brought against an innocent reviewer by an enraged author) of "contemplating the universe through a horse-collar"—are mainly "light." And in selecting from them we must necessarily begin with one much older, as far as date of birth goes, than any one hitherto mentioned in this Book—in fact of the generation of Byron, but one who did not do the work which establishes him here till quite the close of his life, and years after Tennyson and Browning had made their first appearances.

*The Ingoldsby Legends*—delightful in many ways, and a curious touchstone of impartial appreciation of many things—occupy, in the history of English prosody, a place as *jalou*, or characteristic boundary-stone, stage-mark, and guide-post at once. I ventured<sup>1</sup> to compare the vast

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 1, p. 132

metrical miscellany of the Vernon MS to them, and the comparison, disparate as it may seem, deserves resuscitation from the historical point of view. We have in the Vernon (though, of course, by many hands) an illustration of the variety which English verse had, even half way through the fourteenth century, attained by diligent development of the Teutonic-Romance blend of language, and by diligent following of foreign examples under indigenous influence, conditions, and control. The hands were many, and it so happened that the greater single hand that succeeded them—that of Chaucer—did not attempt a very great variety of metres, though it advanced some marvellously. It was the less loss, because of the impending *débâcle* of pronunciation.

But in Barham's case the hand was one, and it came after nearly half a century of the most various performance by hands much greater than itself. It has been seen—and the survey has been traced with some care as its successive moments made their appearance—that comic verse both recognises and stimulates prosodic accomplishment. There is hardly a greater metrist, even in Greek, than Aristophanes, and that master of the metric laugh has been justified of most of his children—even Skelton, for instance, bringing something better than rhythm out of something worse than doggerel.

Indeed "Thomas Ingoldsby" had before him—immediately before him—in such masters as Canning and Praed, exemplars and guides whom he could not greatly better, except in volume, variety, and absolute ease<sup>1</sup>. He does not, as a rule, attempt the daintier and more delicate rhythms of Praed, he deliberately, as it would seem, rejects the less exuberant motives of that master. He relies mainly, if not wholly, on the anapaest in its most uproarious and acrobatic mood. He is, if you like, the circus-rider of English prosody, but he executes every act of his profession with consummate skill, and, what is

<sup>1</sup> And he had beside him not a few others, especially "bright broken Maginn". I have glanced at one or two things—the adapted "Hundred Years Hence" and "The Pewter Quart"—of this accomplished craftsman in light verse, and I wish I could give him full room.

of most importance to us, he does it in a manner which is simply unthinkable, say, a century before—not easily thinkable half a century before. Even Anstey had not dreamt of attempting—even Canning did not actually attempt—anything like the instantaneous changes of line-length, the sweep from ground to saddle, the pirouetting and foot-twinkling leap, the burst through papeied and flaming hoops of rhyme, that diversify these three wonderful volumes.

A low kind of art? That does not seem a necessary subject of discussion. The point is that it is the very highest kind of its own art, and that is all that we have to do with. An easy kind of art? Go thou and do likewise. There have been hundreds who went. I doubt whether any very large percentage ever has done. From the very first lines—

On the lone bleak moor,  
At the midnight hour,  
Beneath the Gallows tree,  
Hand in hand  
The murderers stand  
By one, by two, by three,

to the verses which, long before *Little Dorrit*, immortalised Bleeding Heart Yard, you will never find Baiham “missing his tip”

And the beauty of it is that it could not have been done if long generations, of sometimes most solemn practice, had not supplanted the muscles and sinews, strengthened the constitution, enlarged the aims and the capacities, of English prosody. The rush of the verse—which is almost impossible to overtake in actual reading aloud, though eye- and mind-reading will do it easily enough, the audacious *manège* of the measures—checking, letting out, forcing to rear and curvet, weighting and lightening the movement, flashing gyrations as when a boy flourishes a squib in patterns and flings it from him as far as he can—could not have been achieved without the loosening of the whole prosodic system from the hamper of eighteenth-century rules—without the suppling

and lissoming of the anapæst itself—nay, without the loftier but closely connected experiments of Milton, and Shakespeare, and Spenser. All sorts of things suggest themselves to one in further and further stages of preparation and attempt—through “Back and side, go bare, go bare”, through the snatches of the Miracle Plays and the Ballads, through “Lenten is come with love to town,” and the “Love Rune,” back to the very stammer of Godric, the earliest chirp of the half-awakened bird. Grotesque, burlesque, parody, caricature in matter, in form pure and perfected English prosody, with not a variation of norm that is not easy to be accounted for, not a licence but of those which the severest may allow himself<sup>1</sup>

The longest of Thackeray's works in verse, and one of Thackeray his earliest good things, is an Ingoldsbian imitation—the rather variously titled “Legend of St Sophia”, but he was to do verse-work quite different and much better. The prosody of his “Ballads” is not a careful prosody, it is probably as little deliberate or *recherché* as any that we have examined in these hundreds of pages. There was a time—and I am not sure that this time is altogether gone—when people would have been almost indignant, and quite contemptuous, at the idea of its being gravely considered here at all. Yet it is not to be missed, either as an example of the actual phenomena of its own days, or, more importantly still, as an illustration of the yeoman's service which very largely varied and very freely exercised versification can do to poetic expression. No one with an ear can have missed either the admirable translation into metre of the rub-a-dub of the drum in its “Chronicle,” or the singular felicity of the change when the chronicler comes to offer his own meditations. The contrast is repeated—in quite different mode and material, but with an equally successful result—in “The King of Brentford's Testament,” and the “Age of

<sup>1</sup> It is very difficult to select a typical example, for the variety is of the essence. Perhaps, on the whole, “The Smuggler's Leap” will do as well as any, and the stanzas of its catastrophe will especially show that combination, of almost incredible speed and almost infinite change of verse gesture with strict regularity of principle, which has been indicated.

Wisdom" (another for the quintet), and the "Mahogany Tree," and the "Ballad of Bouillabaisse" If he did not deliberately plan it, no prosodic *coup* was ever more unconsciously successful than the sudden shortening, with no precedent, of the last line in "The End of the Play" The use of the rhythm in "Piscator and Piscatrix", the management of the double rhymes in "Vanitas Vanitatum", the diabolic ingenuity of the double parody of Shelley, or Scott, or Lewis, in "The Willow Tree", the solemnity of "King Canute", the (let us say) absence of solemnity of the "Battle of Limerick", the strum-strum of the "Three Christmas Waits"—all these effects are consummate The verse takes the exact form that the sense requires, it is a question whether its accompaniment does not definitely add to, and "extra-illustrate," that sense

Locker

To Barham and Thackeray it is perhaps only necessary to add here the name of a writer who long outlived them, but was barely ten years younger than Thackeray himself—the name of Mr Frederick Locker, whom it is here surely not necessary to call Lampson Who is there—what doleful creature, fit for the company and habitation of owls other than that of Pallas and dragons that have nothing to do with Cynthia—who knows not the quaintly and delicately crumpled outline of "To My Grandmother,"<sup>1</sup> with its utilisation of the daintiest specimen of that remarkable trochaic monometer catalectic which we have noticed more than once or twice? How agreeably the tailed double triplet suits "My Neighbour Rose,"<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Whether he took it directly or not from Holmes (*v inf* on him) matters little I suppose he did He has never quite attained the serious beauty (*v inf* again) of one splendid stanza of his original, but he is rather daintier

What funny fancy ships  
From between these cherry lips?  
Whisper me,  
Fair Sorceress in punt,  
What canon says I mayn't  
Marry thee?

<sup>2</sup> What change in one short afternoon,  
My own dear neighbour gone—so soon!  
Is yon pale orb her honey moon  
Slow rising hither?

how perfectly "of the Priory" are the anapaests of "Beggars"! "The Garden Lyric" is almost wholly serious, but its music would be less if it were not for the unusual shortening of the last line. I do not know whether Locker or Calverley has imitated the "Agincourt" metre the more perfectly for comic use, and the something which takes so much longer to define than to write appears again to perfection in "Geraldine" I do not think he managed either of Praed's favourite octaves quite so well, though he adopted Mr Swinburne's improvement in the last line of the greater one. But it is only in comparison that these come short. Everywhere in him we find prosodic adequacy and more—the exceptionally high level of it which, as has been said, such verse requires.

The dramatic blank verse of the century deserves separate though not very extensive treatment, for more reasons than one. It will enable us to group Tennyson and Browning in a fresh collocation, and to take notice of some poets who would otherwise hardly find a place here, while the subject in itself is interesting if rather disappointing, and will gear itself on desirably to former and more fortunate treatments of the whole matter.

We saw how, after the break-up of the special form of the medium before the closing of the theatres, and the further interruption caused by the popularity of the heroic, it was revived by Dryden and Lee, not at its old best, but, at *their* best, with something that bore at least the resemblance, in the literary sense, of a silver age to a golden. We saw how no one else raised it even to this height—the inferiority of Otway's, and still more of Southern's blanks being, in great part, cause of their unsatisfactory character as poets. We saw further how, in the latest seventeenth century and throughout the

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O lady, wan and marvellous !  
 How often have we communed thus !  
 Sweet memory shall dwell with us,  
 And joy go with her !

eighteenth, a greater degradation fell on it, due partly to actual poetical incapacity, but partly also to a certain confusion of kinds—the non-dramatic blanks of Milton being before the writers' eyes indiscriminately with the intensely dramatic blanks of Shakespeare, while in the latter case their attention was principally directed to the supreme, but extremely difficult and dangerous, achievements in soliloquy. Mercy to the reader, not idleness or pusillanimity in the writer, forbade the giving of any extensive examination of the strange chequerwork of bombast and baldness which appears in eighteenth-century blank verse of the dramatic kind, but its general nature was duly indicated.

Miss Baillie  
and Talfourd

It cannot be said that the Romantic revival justified itself here as elsewhere. The bombast was perhaps, in the best examples, a little reduced, and the baldness slightly relieved and tufted, but the results tended even more to a mediocrity not much more refreshing to eye and mind than the rhetoric of Young and Home, or the balderdash of Lillo, or the decent flatness of Hannah More. Take, for instance, two such persons as Joanna Baillie and Talfourd. Joanna was really "a sort of kind of as it were" in poetry. Talfourd was a scholar and a man of letters, and could write verse which, if not deserving the great *Pléiade* epithet of *marbrine*, was fairly carved in no bad oolite. Yet there is something extraordinarily unsatisfactory about both. They not only want "—that!" but they want so many "that's!" You turn from them, I do not, of course, say to Shakespeare or to Beaumont and Fletcher, I do not say even to the decadence of Elizabethanism in its better passages, but to Dryden and Lee themselves, and you find a strange difference. If you were (I do not say that it is impossible, but I remember none) to come across in *De Montfort* or *Ion*, or, say, in Milman's *Fazio*, which is fair mock-Elizabethan plaster, such a line as

To the great palace of magnificent Death

or

Singing her flatteries to my morning wake,

you would "wonder how the devil it got there," acknow-

ledging its richness and deploring its rarity You *might* find echoes of the famous passage in the *Mourning Bride*, but could hardly be grateful for them

In the second generation things, if a very little better, are not much better, and are still more curious Whatever the faults of the prosody we have been surveying in this Book, stiffness, feebleness, want of variety, are not of them, and the period might seem to have entered, to the full, into the Elizabethan heritage, without corruption of any neo-classic custom Moreover, to add to the wonder, blank verse in the non-dramatic form is practically recovered—and more than recovered! But not merely when it sets its feet on the boards—when writers confine themselves to the most obvious and self-confessing “closet drama”—the evil eye is on it, the curse is pronounced, the wax image is set to dwindle in the flame, the aiguillette is tied The spells may work in different ways, and achieve the evil result in different degrees—they are never entirely avoided or reversed Prepared as I am to fight, for Tennyson's position among the primates of English poetry, with any adversary, and at all weapons of honour, I have said that his best dramatic passages seem to me to have strayed from something non-dramatic I believe the extremer Browningites maintain that if his best plays, such as *Strafford* and the *Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, are not full successes, it is due, not to inadequacy of medium so much as to the fact that his dramatic faculty, though strong of its kind, was not theatrically dramatic, and for once I am not indisposed to agree with them But still, his dramatic blank verse never seems to me to have the full beauty of its own class The famous apex (I suppose it is that?) of Mildred's self-excuse<sup>1</sup> is itself an instance I can read it to myself, as prose, without the blank verse making itself heard at all, though, of course, it scans all right You will not get Cleopatra's death-words, or Othello's, or the summit-verses of the *Tempest*—you will not get such things as those I quoted, and even gibed at,

<sup>1</sup> I—I was so young,  
Beside, I loved him, Thorold—and I had  
No mother God forgot me—so I fell

Tennyson and  
Browning  
again



in Shirley<sup>1</sup>—to suffer such a process as this. The blank verse there is not "obtrusive" in a bad sense, but it surrounds, animates, pervades the meaning as does the very air of heaven with a living being, its presence giving life, motion, power, its absence, death and destruction.

Taylor

On the whole, I think the nearest to the kingdom, from which even these great ones were shut out, was a writer not yet mentioned, Sir Henry Taylor. The author of *Philip Van Artevelde* was a remarkable prosodist in other ways: the first-come could hardly be modeller at once of

A little bird sat on a greenwood tree,

of the famous or once famous

Quoth tongue of neither maid nor wife,

and of the remarkable stanza of "Lake Lugano", but the best of his blank verse is perhaps better than any of these prosodically. And yet it is noteworthy that it shows best in soliloquies, which (once more) tend to be, though they ought not to be, more like non-dramatic verse than any other part of a play, and certainly are more likely to escape censure for being so. My favourite passage is the speech of Lcolf in *Edwin the Fair* (1842, Act II Scene 11).<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps open to the charge of being a pastiche, not exactly of

Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, St Jerome, and Cicero,

but of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and half-a-dozen other people. But the effect is effective—the adventure has come to the adventurous. I am bound to say, as I shall not return to the subject, that, with most other dramatic blank-verse writers throughout the past century

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II pp. 306-308

<sup>2</sup> Rocks that beheld my boyhood! Perilous shelf  
That nursed my infant courage! Once again  
I stand before you—not as in other days—  
In your grey faces smiling, but like you  
The worse for weather. Here again I stand—  
Again and on the solitary shore  
Old ocean plays as on an instrument,  
Making that ancient music, when not known?

There are even better things in the sequel, but the whole runs to some thirty or forty lines.

and into the present, this effect seems to me to have been missed, this adventure not to have been achieved

Here, perhaps, at the end of the chapter, is the best place (though I have been in more than two minds on the subject) to deal with that marvel, belated<sup>1</sup> prosodically as in other ways, FitzGerald's *Omar Khayyám*. Its author must, as his verse and his prose show almost equally, have been a great, though only partially developed, power in this way, and his orthodoxy (a little on the severer side here) may have accounted as well as anything else for the very natural and innocent, though unfortunately divulged, remarks on Mrs Browning which extracted equally natural and innocent, though still more unfortunate, wrath from her husband. But for our purpose, Time and Space being, unluckily, things relevant, we may confine ourselves to *Omar*, only inviting attention, though not giving comment, to the rest, especially the inset lyrics in *Salāmán and Absal*. For the peculiarities of the decasyllabic quatrain the reader must be asked to look before and after, especially to the passage below on "Laus Veneris" FitzGerald's way of obviating the difficulties and dangers—while availing himself of all the sententious, the "gnomic" power—of the form is to make lines 1, 2, and 4 rhyme, while leaving 3 blank, not merely in regard to its neighbours, but altogether. He thus acquires perfect disjuncture, in all but general meaning, between the stanzas. There is not (for l and li, lxvi and lxvii do not make it)<sup>2</sup> any real exception to this in the whole poem. On the other hand, he enjambes the lines *within* the stanza much, especially in the first couplet, and this, with the constant presence of the blank third line, entirely gets rid of monotony. There is extraordinary virtue in this blank, and in the contrast of run-on line and single-moulded

Edward  
FitzGerald and  
the *Rubáiyát*

<sup>1</sup> Belated, that is to say, comparing its date and the age of its author. In a different ratio of time it could hardly have been earlier. It is belated as the production of a man of fifty, punctual, almost precocious, as the production of 1859.

<sup>2</sup> These numberings refer to the stanzas, as in the main version in Mr Aldis Wright's edition of the *Works*.

stanza For the other virtue which Mr Swinburne has got out of stanzas pair-knitted by the third line, and lines very largely though not wholly single-moulded, we may wait till we come to "Laus Veneris" itself <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It seems needless to give examples from the *Rubáiyát*. It is now, fortunately, well known, and while a single stanza would be inadequate, there is no room for a long passage

## CHAPTER III

### GUEST AND OTHER MID-CENTURY PROSODISTS

Guest's *History of English Rhythms*—The author a "solifidian" of accent—His learning—Its accompanying drawbacks—The three obsessions—Their working—The accentual prejudice—The linguistic-historical delusions—The "section"—Its scheme—Its freaks—Southey's summary verdict—Evans—O'Brien, Latham, Dallas, Lord Redesdale, etc

By one of those coincidences which are mere coincidences only to the obtuse, the work of Tennyson and Browning, which was to sum up, and for the time, as it were, codify the prosody of the Romantic revival in England, had scarcely taken definite form before the most remarkable and extensive book that had ever been written on the general subject appeared. The *History of English Rhythms*<sup>1</sup> of Edwin Guest, then merely Fellow, afterwards Master, of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, is one of those books which, so long as their subject is studied by competent and generous students, can never lose a high place in the story. It has been my unavoidable duty to refer to "Guestianity" in almost invariable terms of reprobation hitherto, and I shall have to expose its defects more minutely and methodically now, but now also will come the opportunity of doing justice to

<sup>1</sup> Two vols., London, 1836-38. Edited anew, after the author's death, with corrections and notes, by Professor Skeat (one vol., London, 1882). It is understood that Dr. Guest had declined to reissue the book himself; and the original contained a note stating that, in the two years' interval between the writing and publication of the volumes, he had (as indeed is obvious) already modified his views. Due weight must be given to this, but quotations will be made from Professor Skeat's edition, since the original is far from common.

the merits of Guest and his work. And this part of the business will be all the more agreeable, because he, like many other people, has experienced the pertinence of the prayer to be saved from one's friends. Since the utter untenableness of his extravagant accentualism made itself felt, the accentualists have been extremely shy of him, and they endeavour to pooh-pooh repetitions of the exposure, as kicking at an open door, and slaying the slain. Now prosodic errors, as we have seen, are never slain so "stone-dead" that another slash or stab is not prudent in their case, and one may much more than suspect an uncomfortable suspicion in the pooh-poohers that the cut or thrust of the *miseri cordi*, when delivered, will go not only through him, but into them.

The author a  
"solidist" in  
of accent

To put the matter in a nutshell, Guest's errors all come from, and are almost all summed up in, his denial—a denial so complete that it takes the form rather of rigid ignoring than of articulate protest—of the foot. His exceedingly awkward system of indicating accents by a dividing line, instead of a superimposed mark,<sup>1</sup> makes his scansion *look* as if they contained feet. But, as Sir John Mandeville says, "men think that they have balm, and they have none." These five-hundred-years-old, if not older, concomitants, or rather components, of English verse have, for him, no existence. The rhythms of Milton, which, as we have shown, are explicable in the simplest fashion by feet, and which with them exhibit their fullest beauty, become, through want of the allowance, inexplicable or shocking to him. There is no such thing, for him, in English as metrical quantity,<sup>2</sup> and no such thing as time in a metrical sense, though he admits long and short vowels. This is at once the cause and the consequence of his *apodism*. "It is accent, accent, all the way," with certain

<sup>1</sup> See above, vol. 1 pp. 8-10—a passage to which objections have been made, but to which I hold *simpliciter* for reasons stated in the Appendix *infra*, No. VI B p. 544.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter v p. 102 (*et cit.*) Guest is pretty copious on phonetic points, and may no doubt interest those who are interested in such matters. His first Book, indeed, of some hundred and fifty pages, is mainly occupied with them, though he often makes prosodic applications. His terminology may sometimes deceive, "rhyme" often meaning "head-rhyme," i.e. "alliteration."

additions and corollaries to be considered presently. That at one time—for he seems to have “modified his views” specially in this respect,<sup>1</sup>—he adopted the extremest notions of the elisionists, insisting on such hideous mispronunciations as “del’cate,” “om’nous,” and the like, cannot be said necessarily to follow from his disbelief in feet. For though (as in Bysshe’s case) the two things are often found together, they are sometimes (as in Johnson’s) separated. His doctrine that two accents must be separated by at least a pause, and could not be separated by more than two unaccepted syllables, is again not incompatible with belief in feet, but in him it was rigidly divorced from any such belief. What he substituted for them we shall see presently. Meanwhile it may be said that, while his faith in accent could not save him from disaster, his unfaith in feet made such disaster necessary.

His merits, however, were really enormous, and his work, like all good work once done, preserves a solid residue of value in fact, however much allowance be made for errors in opinion. Nothing can compare with it, in range and thoroughness, except the much later work of Dr Schipper. It is, on the whole, superior to that in method, and it has the inestimable and (I fear it must be said) indispensable, though in Guest’s case not fully used, advantage which belongs only to the man who is “to the manner born.”

Guest, perhaps prompted by Mitford (whose book he <sup>his learning</sup> knew well, and estimated, all things considered, not unjustly), from the first abandoned the insensate practice of nearly all eighteenth-century prosodists—that of attacking the subject with little or no knowledge of its subject-matter. To this day the extent and thoroughness of his knowledge of Old and Middle English poetry is a marvel.<sup>2</sup> It must have been, in regard to Middle English

<sup>1</sup> Professor Skeat’s notes will be found very useful on this point, but I fear Guest would not have thanked him for talking of “trissyllabic feet.”

<sup>2</sup> The reflections cast on his philological shortcomings, by some of those who find him an inconvenient ally, seem to me a little ungenerous, and even rather imprudent. He came indeed at an early stage of, if not altogether before,

especially, almost wholly derived from MSS., for even Madden's *Layamon* had not appeared when he wrote, and the publications of the EETS, the Philological Society, and most of those of German bodies, periodicals, and individuals, were a generation ahead. He had also—what too many more recent students of "OE" and "ME" have lacked—a competent, if not an exhaustive, knowledge of our poetry from Elizabethan times to the end of the eighteenth century, and though he evidently did not like it, he was pretty familiar with the verse of the great school during the first quarter of the nineteenth. Whether he knew, and what he thought, of that somewhat younger gentleman of Cambridge who had, a few years before, written two little books illustrating almost all the principles of English, and (to use a favourite phrase of his own) violating almost all those of accentual, prosody, I do not know. But, from one or two hints, I should think his knowledge not improbable, and I am nearly sure that he would have judged

A spirit haunts the year's last hours

as severely as the excellent William Smith did later

Its account  
puzzling draw  
backs

For Guest's gifts and graces were—not brought to nought by any means, but—counteracted in all matters of pure opinion, and some of pretty close demonstration, by a wonderful and monstrous set of prejudices and question-beggings. He has often been described as a type of the *a priori* school, and I am not sure that I have not sometimes, in a manner, subscribed to the description. It is, however, not quite accurate, though there is some accuracy in it. The true *a priori* people are those who, as, for instance, Bysshe and Steele, prepare, it may be from quite different points, a theory on the subject without reference to the facts at all, supplement it by more or less (generally less) examination of fact, and save or condemn accordingly, but, above all, prescribe and formulate. Guest does not

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the series of constantly changing linguistic theories and systems which subsequent generations have elaborated and antiquated by turns. But, as is pointed out above, he knew AS and ME literature as few have known it.

quite do this his form of dementia is neither the mathematical madness of the decasyllabists (though he is not wholly free from it) nor the musical mania of the bar-and-rest people I believe I know his book pretty well I have used it, never without re-reading, as a basis of lecturing for the best part of some fifteen years, and before writing this I read it again (a thing not so difficult to do after a good deal of practice, as may be thought) in an entirely different spirit—that is to say, merely attempting to isolate and define its own point of view It has been more and more borne in upon me that Guest was himself by no means sure of this standpoint—that he was not even at one standpoint throughout, and might have taken up a different one still later<sup>1</sup>

He seems to me, in fact, to have conducted his work under the influences of three different obsessions, no one of which he ever worked out thoroughly in all its bearings, which do not necessarily imply each other, and two of which are even rather contradictory

The three  
obsessions

The first<sup>2</sup> was the belief that our verse is wholly dependent upon accent, and that “the principles of accentual rhythm,” whatever they are, govern it exclusively

The second<sup>3</sup> was that the laws of English versification generally are somehow not only dependent on those of *Old* English versification, but identical with them, and always to be adjusted to them

The third<sup>4</sup> was that, somewhere about the early thirteenth century, and increasingly till the end of the fourteenth, there took place a succession of alien invasions which never resulted in a coalescence or blending, but merely in the presence of two hostile elements, and

<sup>1</sup> Once more *cf.* Professor Skert's notes

<sup>2</sup> The evidence of this obsession is concentrated in Book I chap. iv pp. 74-101, but diffused over the entire treatise

<sup>3</sup> This seems to have presented itself to him throughout as a matter of course, not requiring demonstration, and hardly likely to be contested, it is perhaps most categorically affirmed at Book II chap. iii p. 184

<sup>4</sup> This also is pervading It “gathers itself up” most in the context just cited, and at pp. 301 and 400-402, the two last among the most surprising instances of complete misunderstanding of history by a real historical scholar



that while the perfect English versifier will cling to the older and only genuine one, he must, if he does not so cling, give it up altogether, and have nothing to do with anything but "the rhythm of the foreigner"

Now it seems to me, as the result of nearly half a century's reading of English poetry of all ages, that these propositions are in fact false,—false with an increasing degree, and a more and more demonstrable quality, of falseness

In the first place, though accent plays a large part in English prosody, that prosody is as far as possible from being purely or exclusively accentual

In the second, the oldest English poetry and its younger varieties are so utterly different in texture and quality of word-material, and in result of rhythm on the ear, that the same laws cannot, except *per accidens*, apply to them

In the third, instead of two jarring elements, we find before us, from the thirteenth century, at least, onwards, a more and more distinct and harmonious blend of language, resulting, of necessity, in a more and more distinct and harmonious blend of prosody

But let us—for the moment only, and strictly for the sake of argument—suppose that Guest is right, and (though still more conditionally and provisionally) admit also a *fourth* principle, which he adds to, rather than deduces from, the other three —

That<sup>1</sup> the collocation of accented and unaccented syllables forms *sections*, which in turn form, and into which can be reduced, all English verse

Their working

Let us now see how all these things *work*, how they stand comparison with the facts, what authority the propositions derived from and based on them can claim,—how, in short, they perform that office which, as has been often pointed out, every system of prosody must perform satisfactorily or be dismissed as itself unsatisfactory—the office of fitting and interpreting English poetry.

<sup>1</sup> The working out of this fills the bulk of the book

On the part of the accentual division, which concerns the Accent *v* Quantity battle, little need be said. Guest himself observes, with the greatest possible truth, that in the discussion of that question "more learning has been shown than either good sense or good temper," and the truth has certainly not got less truthful with the passage of seventy years. But there is no need of learning, no danger of ill-temper, and not even any remarkable demand for good sense, in dealing with *his* dealing. He thinks<sup>1</sup> that, in the sense of quantity as connected with metrical value, we have none in the English language, but he thinks that in English there are some syllables which are "longer"—that is, which require more time for pronunciation—than others, and still more certainly some "long" vowels. Now the only sense of "quantity" which is employed in this book is that of metrical value—the question of necessary connection with time is left open. And we do not say here, as Guest does, though he disfranchises quantity, that the *a* in "father" is long, while the *a* in "fathom" is short. The *a* in "fathom" is long enough—is as long as that in "father" in

Full fa|thom five | thy fa|ther lies,

and I should rather doubt whether you could ever make the *a* of "fathom" as short as that of "father" is in "grandfather" and "forefather" as ordinarily pronounced, though, of course, you may "stress up" both to any length. Therefore here we may let him alone, even when he finds fault with Spenser and Sidney for making "hilly" long "against the evidence of their senses." The evidence of our senses agrees with them (though not exactly for their reasons), and so we must agree to differ with him.

But when we come to his axioms, *media* and *inferiora*, on things accentual, then we find real difficulties, and a perpetually unanswered "*Why?*" rises to the lips. Suppose it is all accent. Why can no two adjoining syllables be accented, unless there is a pause between

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on the subject—I *v* *This* quantity may be "an embellishment of rhythm," but we have no "temporal" rhythms.

them? I can accent them without a pause as easily as I can write them. Why ought the adjective always to be more strongly accented than the substantive? Why does accentual rhythm necessarily imply fixed *cæsura*?<sup>1</sup> Why, *on accentual principles*, can no more than two unaccented syllables be interposed between accented ones? I could accumulate scores of these whys, which I dare swear will never find their wherefores as long as English is English.

The accentual  
prejudice

But if it is impossible for these "laws" to produce their commissions, it is still more flagrantly impossible for them to justify themselves by their works. Between them they have the unenviable distinction of blackmarking some of the very greatest and choicest things in English poetry—a crime which, as has been pointed out, is the unpardonable sin in prosody. A prosodic scheme which fails to account either for faults or (as far as beauty can ever be accounted for) beauties is at best incomplete, and one which, like Steele's, obscures beauties is impertinent, but one which condemns them is itself anathema. Guest's condemnations are in a manner famous to all who have studied the subject, though not, of course, to the general reader. We have noticed how he dismisses contemptuously some of the finest rhythms in Burns and Coleridge.<sup>2</sup> Like Johnson, with whom he does not very often agree, accentualists as they both are, he denounces<sup>3</sup> Cowley's lovely line—

And the soft wings of Peace cover him round,  
partly because he chooses to foist in an unnecessary pause at "Peace." He declares<sup>4</sup> some of the noblest things in Shakespeare, such as

Dead

Is noble Timon,

to be "opposed to every principle of versification," and he has for Milton<sup>5</sup> a mixture of argument and scolding on the subject of

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps one *can* answer this, "Because its natural chaos becomes even more chaotic without such *cæsura*."

<sup>2</sup> Page 183

<sup>3</sup> Page 229

<sup>4</sup> Page 153

<sup>5</sup> Page 185

## The Cherub Con|templation

But Guest's second obsession was of a far more fatal character than his first. I venture to think that (doubtless, through my own fault) the attitude of this book to accentual scansion has been somewhat mistaken by certain critics. I think that scansion wrongly based, as well as necessarily and miserably inadequate. I think that a man who confines himself to it misses much of the understanding, and very much of the pleasure, which the system of foot-scansion supplies. But I do not think that he need necessarily go wrong—as far as he goes at all—in practice.

The linguistic-  
historical  
conclusions

Now Guest supplemented, muddled, and bedevilled his accentual procedure with the gratuitous, unhistorical, and, one would have thought, almost inconceivable theory, that the whole course of English poetry from Caedmon to his own time (which, be it remembered, was to his certain knowledge the time of Coleridge and Keats, to his possible knowledge the time of Tennyson and Browning) ought to go, must go, did go, on the same principles. It was this that really wrecked him, and it is one of the most astonishing things in the whole of our history—which is not barren in occasions for amazement. If he had been ignorant of Old English the thing would have been intelligible enough, but, as we have said, he knew it very well. I doubt whether, at the time of his writing, any man living, in or out of England, knew the *literature* better—whatever may have been his real or supposed linguistic shortcomings. And how any man, with any ear at all, could read Caedmon and Coleridge, the Exeter Book and Shelley, and fancy that they represented identical systems of prosody—even systems obeyed in the one case, and sinned against, but existing by right, in the other,—is to me absolutely inconceivable.

The combination of these two obsessions almost necessitated others. It was certainly accompanied by them. Once more, how Guest even at times (for he seems, now and again, to have had searchings of heart), could

figure to himself the course and life of English language and literature, from the thirteenth century onward, as a case of the English Michael and his angels fighting against the Latin-Romance devil and his angels, is only not so inconceivable as what has just been mentioned, because it has been exemplified in a greater number of persons. The "pure Saxon" folly—the championship of "ungothroughsomeness" and its kin—seems to have been more or less prevalent for the last century. Once more, it is impossible to reconcile it with any knowledge even of literature by itself or of language by itself, much less with the (alas! too seldom combined) knowledge of both.<sup>1</sup>

The  
"section "

The three errors, however, were all united in Guest, and they brought forth, as has been said, another—the "sectional" system, which is the direct cause of most of his worst single enormities, and though perhaps not the most generally noticed, by no means the least surprising thing in his surprising book. Not very many people, I should fancy, have worked steadily through the immense mass of classified examples by which he endeavours to prove, or at least exhibit, "sectional" scansion from the "Genesis" to the "Revelation" of the English prosodic Bible, but I do not think any one can call himself a thorough student of the subject who has not

Its scheme

The labours of him who has will at any rate not be without their reward. There is, to begin with, that extraordinary scheme<sup>2</sup> of *possible* section-combinations which has been more than once alluded to, and which he

<sup>1</sup> See, for justification of this, especially the passage already cited (p. 400 *sq.*), where the preconception actually makes him say that "Latin and French deranged the vocabulary of our language, *but never its form and structure*", that the streams "flowed through *various* channels." Perhaps the most astonishing *single* confession of being "joined to idols" is at p. 561. "Of all the metres known to our poetry, that which has best succeeded in reconciling the poet's freedom with the demands of science is—the alliterative system of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors." And the most interesting glimmer of resipiscence is at 414-445, where he makes a sort of apology to Milton and even admits the possibility of the stream "resulting from the union of two or more independent streamlets, which in blending their waters have mixed their properties." Grant this frankly, and his system disappears, while ours takes its place.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 160. The table prefixed to the second edition is Professor Skeat's, and most useful.

seems quite gravely to think that some industrious poet might very profitably work out in practice to try what would do and what would not. I have never myself sympathised with those cold moderns who object to the plan, recognised by Aldrich, of reckoning all possible combinations of premiss and conclusion systematically, and then rejecting those that are contrary to the general laws of syllogism, for both the combination and the rejection are useful logical exercises, and proper to the rudiments of an Art, if not congenial to the high-flying exigencies of a Science. But this Guestian process is one of the worst exemplifications of prosodic pravity in putting the Rule before the Work—not to mention that, to judge by his own results, the exclusion and admission of examples would have proceeded on totally false principles.

For if ever a man took enormous pains to prove those pains vain, that man was Guest. Wherever his "sections" are harmless, they are absolutely superfluous: the simple foot-and-pause (or no-pause) system antiquates them hopelessly. In many cases they do positive harm, for it is the application of them which proves Shakespeare and Milton to have been guilty of high treason to the majesty of accent, Burns and Spenser to have used metres with "very little to recommend them" and "wanting in good taste." He is so (the word must be used) besotted with them, that he solemnly informs us that they rest on a principle which is not an actual law invented for the mere purposes of arrangement, but is "the model on which the great majority of these verses ["four-accent"] have been actually formed." The "great majority" of English iambic, trochaic, and anapaestic dimeters (for that is what it comes to) apparently exists in the three-volume *corpus* of Anglo-Saxon verse<sup>1</sup>. The hundreds, nay thousands of volumes full of them from Layamon to Swinburne, or (to be rigidly fair towards Guest's date) from Layamon to Browning, form a small minority<sup>1</sup>.

A few results will speak for themselves. That the commonest equivalences and other metrical incidents are

made to generate separate "sections"<sup>1</sup> (in a fashion which always makes me think of Quintilian's demure satire on the Greek figure-mongers) is a necessary consequence, and it may be said not a fatal one, but at the worst polypragmatic and supererogatory. But it is a much more serious thing when the actual scansion of a line is interfered with, and perhaps hopelessly spoilt, to make a "section" where no section should be. I regard it as an utter mistake to put any strong division<sup>2</sup> at

Void of sorrow and void of care (p. 190),

and a worse to put any whatever at

Two blissful twins are to be born,

while the whole system of "sectional pause" (v. p. 296 and thereabouts) is utter cobweb, and should be simply broomed away.

Its freaks

But some of his exploits in this *vu*-sectional torture stagger reason, for instance—

Whom God hath of his special favour raised (p. 297),  
and

Shall he, nursed in the peasant's lowly shed,

in neither of which cases will any fetch about difference between "pause" and "stop" give the slightest assistance.

Here are four extraordinary instances of Alexandrine "section" from the *Faerie Queene*. It is of course true that Spenser, not using the verse continuously, has taken the liberty of sometimes neglecting its otherwise almost essential middle pause. Yet when he does this he generally makes no real pause at all, in fact it appears to be done chiefly because he wants a pauseless line. But a pauseless line was to Guest an unthinkable monstrosity,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it should be said that a "section" is a bundle of "accented" and "unaccented" syllables extending in possible bulk from *three* syllables with *two* accents (Guest's minimum) to *eleven* syllables with *three* accents. Of a pair of these, similar or dissimilar, a verse consists.

<sup>2</sup> The colon is, of course, Guest's own division mark.

<sup>3</sup> This, which is an inevitable result of his system, would suffice to damn it, for with the pauseless line disappears almost all possibility of the verse-pyriphragm, and of the perfecting of blank verse generally, as well as a mighty engine of beauty and variety in couplet and stanza.

and so he performs the following marvellous "surgical operations"—

As well in curious instruments as cunning lays  
 They throned the second Constantine with joyous tears  
 How he that lady's liberty might enterprise  
 Their hearts were sick, their eyes were sore their hands were lame ,

where the first and third neither need nor, I dare swear, have a pause at all, the second has but the very slightest, easily negligible altogether, and the fourth, if it has any, has *two*, at "sick" and "sore"

I hold no brief for Byron, but the following (p 244) is really too bad—

"Byron, whose negligent versification has never yet been properly censured, has given us one or two examples of the verse 6 2 To slip a verse of this kind into a modern poem is little better than laying a trap for the modern reader"

The modern reader, properly cautioned, may ask what this mysterious "verse 6 2" is? This is it

Look on me, the grave hath not chang'd thee more

It is, of course, no masterpiece, but perfectly easy to scan and pause without any senseless and cacophonous pseudocasura. The real pause is, absolutely beyond question, at "me," and "the" is lengthened or accentuated as it very commonly is, especially after, and by the help of, such a pause. But a pause at the third syllable was abhorrent to Guest, and an accented "the" more so. So he makes Byron scan it as below,<sup>1</sup> and scolds him for doing what "the noble poet," one of whose good points was a command of "*English* simplicity" of language, would have characterised in terms improper for this page.

I have thought it, however, better to reinforce and illustrate what I have said in the text, by abundant refer-

<sup>1</sup> It may further amuse the entrapped bird to see this scansion

Look on | me, the grave | hath not | chang|'d thee mor|e

The divisions are, of course (*v. sup* p 276 note), not intended as divisions, but if any one will follow this scansion *accidentally*, substituting ' for | and, giving the pause at "not," he will see, once for all, the hideous jumble and "cagnag" of sounds which this accental scansion makes, and regards as quite legitimate



ences and citations in the notes, than to fill pages with running comment on particular enormities. But there is one peculiarity, which I might almost call a fifth obsession, and on which I must dwell a little. Unless the reader's faculty of surprise has been actually torpedoed<sup>1</sup> into callousness by the extraordinary things he finds in this book, he will open his eyes more widely than ever at discovering that, next to the poetry before AD 1000, Guest, on the whole, prefers that between 1660 and 1800. It is true that he slips expressions about Pope's "coldness"—he is anything but consistent, and indeed could hardly be with so fantastic a creed. But, on the whole, the thing is so.

The reason of this thing, however, will not long escape the student. Odd as *Deor* and the *Dispensary*, *Genesis B* and *Bysshe*, Johnson and *Juliana* may look together, there is no doubt that Augustan couplet-verse, with its regular accents and pauses, and its strong centre-split, lends itself to Guest's system as easily as possible, while Elizabethan and nineteenth-century varieties and excursions are utterly rebel thereto. He would not ask himself the question, "Is not this rather suspicious?" or perhaps he *did* ask it, though he would not let the answer escape.<sup>2</sup>

In one of the latest of his published letters<sup>3</sup> Southey says that he is occupied, among other things, with a review of Guest for the *Quarterly*, adding, "nothing can be more worthless than the first volume, but in the second there is a great deal that is curious." This was quite a full year before the decline of mental power, which came upon him, made itself definitely apparent, but, as usual with him, he had endless other things on hand, and the review does not seem to have ever got itself written, or at least published. It is no small loss, for, as has been already

Southey's  
summary  
verdict

<sup>1</sup> I refer to Nature's torpedo and not to Mr. Whitehead's.

<sup>2</sup> Must I repeat that there is no *retorsion* here possible? Popian verse is no more rebel to our system than to Guest's, though it may not be so highly placed therein.

<sup>3</sup> Oct. 26, 1838 (*Letters*, vol. iv p. 560). It has all the more interest from being addressed to Wynn, his prosodic correspondent forty years earlier (*vsup* p. 49).

remarked, Southey's ideas on metre, though nowhere much developed, seem to have been singularly just, and his knowledge of English poetry from the sixteenth century onward, at least to the early nineteenth, was, and probably is, unrivalled. It would not, of course, be fair to either party to take the sweeping condemnation of the first volume (the *system*) as expressing his full and final judgment, made as it is in a mere glance during a letter to a friend. But his judgment on the second shows that he recognised the value of Guest's survey of *matter*.

Yet he was in a manner right, in both judgments, though a considerable proviso and saving clause has to be made to the first. No study of such a subject as this, made by a man of scholarship and wits, can be "worthless," because its very errors are of great price. Guest has actually saved his opponents, as to versification by accent only, the trouble of writing a treatise, which could easily be as long as his own, to show its inevitable consequences. You cannot have a man much better informed than he was in all the poetry of English up to his time, and as for what has come since, if a man will not hear Keats and Coleridge reinforcing Shakespeare and Milton, it would have been no use if Tennyson and Browning and Mr Swinburne had been born earlier on purpose to convince him. No one who reads his book can think him a fool or a perfunctory dealer with the subject. Nothing, therefore, but the radical unsoundness of his theory, could have led him to such utterly absurd results in practice as the condemnation of some of the finest lines of English poetry, or the decision (more preposterous even than condemnation) that Shakespeare and Milton "had no right"<sup>1</sup> to produce the beautiful effects that they produced—that theirs was a sort of Black Art, its beauty a succubus, the pleasure it gave soul-destroying and damnable, imitation of its effects an outrage and a crime. No wonder that more timid and less logical votaries of his idols wish to smuggle

<sup>1</sup> His own phrase. The "right to work" may be questionable, if only because a negative seems to have slipped out somewhere, and there are those who question an unqualified "right to exist", but to question the "right to be beautiful" is indeed a marvellous proceeding.

him away, cry "Agreed! agreed!" when any one calls attention to him, and the like

But his second volume is not alone in being, as Southey admitted, very "curious" in the best and oldest sense of that word—meaning worth diligent and interested attention. I should myself go so far as to say that the whole book deserves the same description. I have never hesitated to indicate it, with a few general cautions, as the best handbook of the subject hitherto and, except in the case of a very dull person, or to save time, I should not hesitate so to indicate it without any caution at all—sure that the reader would soon find out its weak parts, and could derive nothing but benefit from its strong. For though Guest's principles were hopelessly wrong, his method (which, if man were not the most inconsistent of animals, ought to have taken his principles and wrung their necks) is almost perfectly right. It is, except when the principles interfere, purely historical, and the history is so pervading that it automatically points out the errors of the principles themselves. Here you have arranged, in chronological order for the most part, examples of almost all English lines and of a very large number of line-combinations. You could not have found them out for yourself (*crede experto*!) without years of labour and trouble. Here all, or most of it, is done to your hand, and you have only got to supplement it, with a similar historical conspectus of later movements and tendencies, to have all your necessary materials before you. I myself never read Guest till Professor Skeat republished him, nor indeed for some years after, and I had (as I have ventured to assure the reader) interested myself in English poetry and English prosody far earlier. He could tell me little that I did not know as to matters since Chaucer, and I knew something of matters before. But the reading of his survey, and the assistance of his method, gave me a most powerful help in ceasing to see "confusedly"—in sorting and arranging the myriad facts of the matter. It may seem to be an odd fee for this assistance to take away his prosodic character. But, after all, he called his book

*A History of English Rhythms* It is a history of English rhythms, and a right learned and valuable one. And it is not precisely every book of which it can be said that it comes up to its title learnedly and valuably.

At the same time, it attempts to be something more, and while, quite conscious of the *de te fabula*, one is regretfully bound to echo, in one sense and to some extent, Mr Omond's accusation that Guest's book has been "a great misfortune for English metrical science." I have, I think, shown that it ought to have done little harm. I fear I cannot deny that it has done a great deal. Perhaps there are not so many readers as there should be who possess that *separating* faculty which, after all, as it is the translation, so it is the foundation of Criticism. And this book so far excelled anything that had gone before it, and anything that followed it for decades and almost lifetimes, that its influence—indirect, and at second hand rather than at first, perhaps—cannot but have been disastrous. It has certainly coloured most of the prosodic writing since. And it is curious (though, after all, as far as possible from being unexampled) that those who admit its shortcomings almost impatiently, try to smuggle them away, affect to regard them as admittedly discarded, yet cling to the very points of the Guestian doctrine which brought about these shortcomings themselves. Nor is this the case only with what may be called—though we are a very uncovenanted and Cyclopean, not to say Ishmaelite, community—"professional" prosodists. Certainly, as I shall endeavour to show in the corresponding chapter of the next Book, all sorts of fantastic heresies date directly or indirectly from Guest. But it is at least ten to one that if you meet a layman, of rather superior intelligence and reading, who has troubled himself about prosody a little but not much, you will find that the "gainsaying of Guest" has had more or less effect upon him. I do not want Guest to be swallowed up—I think he is too useful, in the first place, as an example of that "Rule of False" which is always to me precious in its applications almost beyond anything, and I think that in

the second he contains too much valuable matter. But that he is utterly wrong in his main views and contentions, that his "accents" are a beggarly element and his "sections" a thing vainly invented,—this I may say, without rashness, that I do not think, but know, and have proved

The importance of Guest is so great that he might almost have had this chapter to himself, and independently of it there happen to be not many writers whom it is necessary, or even convenient, to couple with him. Edgar Poe, who, a few years later, came closer to the truth of the whole matter than any one else, though hardly with full consciousness, and while making many mistakes, will fall to be noticed in a separate chapter dealing with the most noteworthy poets and prosodists of his own country. Much, if not most, of the attention bestowed on the subject in the middle third of the nineteenth century was determined (partly through the popularity of *Evangeline*) to the matter of the hexameter and this also has its appointed separate treatment. There are, however, a few writers on prosody, between 1838 and the sixties, who may deserve to accompany the Master of Sidney. Some of them, indeed, have considerable repute—whether entirely by desert is another question.

EVANS

Of their works Archdeacon Evans's *Treatise on Versification* (1852) is (to me at least) the most interesting, but its interest consists almost wholly in its point of view, especially when we notice its date. I do not know that I should, as my friend Mr Omond does, stigmatise offhand as "ancient errors" the statements that verse is constituted by "the regulated recurrence of a syllable," and that stress "necessarily prolongs time of vowel." In the first a great deal depends upon what you mean by "regulated", and in the second everything depends on what you mean by "time." But I certainly should never make these statements, in their actual forms, myself. And some others, which Mr Omond does not quote, can hardly escape by the most ingenious glossing. That

"stress is the only basis of versification in any modern language" is a proposition which I utterly deny, and which I can, I believe, prove to be false in the case of most languages. That there can be "only one stress in each word" is, again, a fond thing vainly invented, the falsity of which I should have defied the Archdeacon to preach the shortest of sermons without demonstrating. But we have heard all this before. What makes the book interesting is the author's profound and almost childlike belief in the hopeless inferiority of English, and especially of English poetry, to those classical languages and literatures with which he chiefly deals, and of which he is—most rightly—an enthusiastic admirer. "Nothing but a resolute forgetfulness of the ancient measures can make us feel any satisfaction with blank verse." It may be so, but I am sure that I shall not forget the choruses of Æschylus, and the hexameters of the *De Rerum Natura*, till death or dotage comes upon me, and yet I feel more satisfaction with blank verse every day I live. "An evil genius seems to have presided over our lyric poetry. It must always be a blank"—a sheet of white paper on which the names of Shakespeare and Donne and Herrick, of Blake and Keats and Shelley, of Tennyson and Browning and Swinburne, are absolutely illegible. But the most curious expression of this curious faith, or unfaith, is to come. Twice over, in different form and in different context, does the excellent Archdeacon remark that while the ancient poets lose considerably (one fully agrees here) by translation, Shakespeare and Milton are "wonderfully improved," "gain exceedingly," by being cleverly rendered into Greek trimeters and hexameters. This attitude is so odd that I should like to know whether this Welsh clergyman was also a Welsh poet, and whether this double function could have anything to do with the matter. I understand that Welsh verse is very regular, and the irregularity of English seems to be one of Evans's chief objections to it, as compared, especially in lyric, to the classics. Besides, he thinks that English is, as a language, "deficient in richness and variety of

sound," and I have heard that this is a Cymric charge against it

Such a charge, of course, may be dismissed without calling on counsel to reply. It is surely a piece, either of actual physical insensibility, or of the lower and misbegotten "patriotism"—of the same Philistine *βαναυσία* which makes other people talk of the "Welsh gurgle" or the "Gaelic whine." It is, however, curiously parallel to a German absurdity which was referred to above (p. 176), and to an expression of Eurasian opinion which I once quoted elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. But it, and the whole book, are certainly interesting as coming from a man of ability, and of the fullest "liberal education," who must have spoken, who certainly wrote, English with, as it were, native competence, and who was writing after the middle of the nineteenth century—ten years after the issue of Tennyson's collected *Poems*, and with all but the last chapter of the book of English poetry, up to the present day, complete before him.

O'Brien,  
Latham,  
Dallas, Lord  
Redesdale, etc

Some places which I have drawn blank, or nearly so, may be grouped together. William O'Brien's *Ancient Rhythmical Art Recovered* (1843), a posthumous work, is almost entirely on Greek choric verse, and is thus half-excusably musical, but it adopts "isochronism" as metre's first law. Latham's famous or once-famous *English Language* (1841) has a considerable prosody section, which was progressively enlarged. It is, I believe, responsible for the sickening symbol *xa ax* which has infested prosody-books since, and it is so besottedly accentual as to lay it down that "regularity of accent makes verse, irregularity prose." It never really *faces* "substitution", and, on the whole, may be said to have done as much harm as any other book on the subject, if not more, because of the authority which, somehow or other, it obtained. E. S. Dallas in his *Poetus* (1852) displays that curious and rather deplorable mixture of talent and acuteness, dashed and brewed with discursive

<sup>1</sup> *Corrected Impressions* (London, 1895), p. 27. It came to this, that Tennyson was "like prose."

quasi-philosophical jargon, which is characteristic of all his work "The effect of the second law [of harmony] upon the tune, a tune engendered by that of rhythm, will be to prolong and repeat the strain so as to impart its own self-complacency to the outward form" This really might have been written in 1910 instead of in 1852 and somewhere about 1600, by Feste in his altitudes, as well as at either date It is pure gibberish, the dialect of a prosodic Pigiogromitus He dwells much on opposition of "bar" and "stanza", but has acute *aperçus*, as where he sees that *Thalaba* verse,<sup>1</sup> is for the most part only disjointed blanks Lord Redesdale's two short pamphlets *Thoughts* and *Further Thoughts on Prosody* (Oxford, 1857) are worth reading, even if they were not by Mitford's nephew and by a formidable Chairman of Committees They are chiefly jottings about the hexameter question, with some translations of his own The notion that the Universities might compile a Quantitative Lexicon of English, sounds perhaps odder than it is—or was And there are some sensible remarks, as on that curiously un-Horatian character of Dryden's nevertheless great translation of Horace, which has struck some persons independently, while others have been obstinately blind to it But the things pretend to no system<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Not, however, in *Thalaba* itself, as we have seen above

<sup>2</sup> An article on Greek and English Accentuation in the *Eclectic Review* for 1838 (Fourth Series, vol. III, p. 395), and so exactly contemporary with Guest, contains a proposition which might be fruitfully handled as a text, though it can hardly be accepted as a dogma "Accent determines that a line shall be metrical Quantity gives it expression, harmony, variety" I should translate this "The presence of equal or equivalent feet determines that a line shall be metrical The constitution of those feet, with the arrangement of their pauses, gives expression, harmony, variety" And I should not be surprised if we both meant very much the same thing



## INTERCHAPTER X

THE substance of the summary of prosodic practice which we have to give in this Interchapter may be briefly put. It imports full entrance on the heritage which had been gained in the past the exercise, deliberate and unrestrained, of the franchise of English prosody. Even in Matthew Arnold, the most academically self-restraining of the greater poets of the period, as well as the least naturally inclined to self-indulgence in this particular department, the negative commandments of the eighteenth century have been taken down from any position of prominence, in others they may be said to be completely erased or struck through. Make harmonious measure in any way you please, provided you make it—make the measure vary in any single poem as well as in different poems, just as the fancy strikes you—is the motto of this Thelemic, and everybody acts up to it.

I cannot myself perceive the slightest counter-argument of value against the proposition that Tennyson is at once the earliest exponent, and to no small extent the definite master, of this new ordered liberty<sup>1</sup>. It is years before even Browning produces largely varied experiments in metre, his wife (not yet his wife) does not in her earliest attempts, or before the forties at all, go beyond the half-way house of *Mrs Hemans* and *Miss Landon*, and Mr Arnold was a boy of eight years old when the first experiments of Tennyson in prosody came to puzzle Coleridge.

<sup>1</sup> I have, I think, seen it stated that the "Hollyhock Song" (*v. sup* p. 188) is Keatsian. As far as prosody goes, this may be uncompromisingly denied. Beddoes and Darley might be brought in as a little earlier parallels, but they were practically contemporaries.

But it is in that puzzlement itself that the strongest argument for Tennyson's advance lies. It has been pointed out (with all due respect, I hope) that Coleridge does not seem to have applied to questions of metrical criticism the marvellous subtlety and originality<sup>1</sup> which were at his disposal elsewhere, that his very explanation of the *Christabel* metre is confused and inadequate from its own point of view, that he ignores or evades metrical points strangely in the elaborate examination of Wordsworth, and that, in the *corpus*—sadly incomplete and desultory no doubt, but very wide-ranging—of his critical miscellanies, such questions are rarely touched. In fact there is no stronger proof than Coleridge of the doctrine of unconscious cerebration in prosody, which these volumes have striven to illustrate consistently. We have noticed, and shall probably again notice in this chapter, much later and more distinct evidences of want of appreciation, but none quite so remarkable as this.

Thus, as usual, the light shined in darkness but it shone. I have endeavoured, in the proper place, to give such a conspectus as was possible of the details of Tennyson's achievement in new forms, and in alteration of old ones. Here it is merely desirable to gather up its results and character. They can be easily summed—in fact the summary has already been given more than once by glance in anticipation—as Variety and Freedom, subject to Order. Of Tennyson it may be said, with utmost truth, that he touched no rhythm that he did not adorn, and that few poets have touched so many rhythms. For the very swiftest he had less fancy than for slow and medium paces, yet, as late as the *Ballads*, in the "Voyage of Macdunc" more especially, he showed that it was no positive inability which prevented him from trying them. For very irregular metres—irregular in the sense of outline and contour, not of rhythm—he had again somewhat less fancy, though here also hardly less.

<sup>1</sup> I know no better touchstone of the scholar, as opposed to the sciolist and the paradoxer, than perception or non-perception of this subtlety and originality in Coleridge. It is an old one no doubt, but somehow most touchstones are old.

power, and he did not very often practise the largest or most canzone-like lyrical stanzas in repeated order, though he showed in "The Lotos-Eaters," once for all, what a master he was of the Spenserian. For the shorter lyrical stanzas, especially the quatrain of various lengths and the short-lined octave, he was one of the very greatest masters in English. The two forms of "The Palace of Art" and the "Dream of Fair Women" are to me perfect Cleopatras in their absolute inexhaustibleness of charm, and as much may be said for the octaves of the "Voyage," the extended *rime couée* of "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" and many others. He was equally happy, and equally inexhaustible, in elaborate but not regularly strophic lyrical paragraphs, like those of the latter part of "The Lotos-Eaters" and the better part of *Maud*, and it would be mere repetition of the earlier analysis to mention things (such as the trochaic passage in the "Vision of Sin") which he has left as separate diploma-pieces to show what he could do.

In contrast to, and in reinforcement of, this varied power, his extraordinary accomplishment in blank verse is almost unique. It is impossible for any one really skilled in the comparative anatomy of the kinds of this great and difficult form to call his—as Keats's may be called with incomplete justice, but without complete injustice—a pastiche of Milton's, and he has entirely got rid of the less desirable features of Thomson's, the second most important influence which pervaded the blanks of the eighteenth century. When his exercise really begins—that is, in "CEnone," as revised—he presents hardly any resemblance to the Wordsworthian-Shelleyan form, which may perhaps be ranked as the third, which may have had a little effect on him earlier, and which certainly had much on Browning. Although the indefinable but constantly sensible difference between dramatic and non-dramatic verse manifests itself at once between his and Shakespeare's, it was, beyond possible doubt, by blending the quality of the two unmatchable blank-verse masters, and distilling it afresh with his own quint-

essence, that he reached the perfection of "Ænone" itself, of "Ulysses," and of the "Morte"—a perfection which continues little changed, as has been said, till "The Holy Grail" at least. But Elizabethan poets earlier than Shakespeare taught him the epanaphora which, extremely effective as it is, he latterly rather abused, and in his "turns" and repetitions of words, not at the beginning alone, he is markedly Spenserian. The tendency to a perilously large dose of trisyllabic feet did not come on him till late. It rather corresponded in this way to Shakespeare's later indulgence in redundancy, which Tennyson never, in his non-dramatic verse, practised largely. But, by whatever special methods and in whatever special way, he certainly furnished himself with a seldom equalled and only twice surpassed brand of the measure for continuous use, and thus, when his immensely varied accomplishment in other measures is taken in, he stands as one of the very few English poets who are wholly *ambidextrous*, who can manage the short poem and the long with indifferent and consummate accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

The general case, as was pointed out in the analysis, is the same with Browning, but it shows curious and interesting differences of kind and degree in particular. In a certain sense, no doubt, Browning may be said to have mastered a kind of blank verse which was adequate to his long-poem purposes, but then it was (or at least became) rather more blank than verse. Although, as I have tried to show, by no means really "irregular" in any bad sense, it was, and was clearly meant to be, of a prosaic texture. Tennyson never comes very near prose, but when he is least distant from it, it is almost invariably in some other measure than blanks—in the rather muddled trochaics and anapæstics of part of *Maud*, in the

<sup>1</sup> The common blame of "lacking architectonic" is thus, as far as prosody is concerned, absolutely unfounded. It is not my business here to treat it from any other point of view. As for that "loading of the rifts with ore" which Keats prescribed, there is almost agreement about it, if not always an agreement of gratitude. The wiser folk are surely they who perform and enjoy the inexhaustible *unpacking* of the treasure, who let the elixirs which the poet has so carefully distilled trickle to the inmost cranny of their soul.

namby-pamby fourteeners of the "May Queen," and elsewhere in other forms. Even the prosaic and prosaically treated matter of "Dora" and its likes, even his latest and loosest experiments, are never prosaic in their form. But the curious medium which Browning, after his first Wordsworthian-Shelleyan practice, worked out for himself, is often merely what the eighteenth-century gainsayers of blank verse called it, "measured prose", and his most *poetical* long-poein vehicles are the equivalenced octosyllables of *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* and the Alexandrines of *Fifine at the Fair*.

But the touch of lyric banishes prose with him, as it was not necessary for it to do in Tennyson's case, but with no less satisfactory result. He may not be quite so free-born, but he attains his freedom early, and keeps it unstained. The reckless acrobatics of "A Likeness" are not prose or anything like prose: the largely prosaic matter and diction of "Up at a Villa, Down in the City" keep poetic form in its most outrageous expressions, and pass into an almost perfect kind of that form in such lines as

And the hills oversmoked behind by the faint grey olive trees

It is no matter—or it should be no matter—that he makes the good-natured Muse of Prosody his partner in country dances and Highland flings, and even double shuffles, as well as in stately pavaues and minuets, and in the "sway and swing" of the most voluptuous waltzes. He can give her these too, and does give them, as we have seen. His words want no song, and could find no mere song worthy of them, when he is in the mood of "Love Among the Ruins," or "The Last Ride Together," or "In a Gondola." And here as elsewhere, here as everywhere in this Book and almost everywhere in this volume, we find the moods, whether lighter or graver, taking forms of the most endless variety in length and adjustment of length, in metre and combination of metre, in outline and symphony and choric scheme. I like to read Browning with the words of my beloved Bysshe ringing in my ears: "Our poetry admits for the most part but three sorts of

verses—that is to say, verses of ten, eight, and seven syllables. Our ancient poets frequently made use of intermixed rhyme, etc. But this is now wholly laid aside. It arranges itself in the most agreeable recitative, and “but this is now wholly laid aside” comes, in its new meaning, with a crash at the end in the joyfullest manner.

The lesson of the tendency of the period, and of its value, is certainly not weakened by the evidence of Mrs Browning's work and by that of Matthew Arnold's. Mrs Browning's horrible and heartrending cacophonies of rhyme cannot be visited upon the new liberty, in fact hardly one of them is worse than the great Mr Pope's “satire” and “nature” in the palmiest days of the old régime. And it is quite certain that, under that régime, she never would have allowed herself—nay, she never would have thought of—such more than satisfying, such endlessly suggestive and pregnant melodies, as those of the “Duchess May” or the “Brown Rosary.” You cannot, with her and in this context, repeat the easy, idle brocard that “her faults are those of the time, and her merits her own,” for it is only too true that her faults are her own, while her merits belong very largely to the time. And her increased variety and intricacy of audible delight, as compared with the results of her so often mentioned elder and lesser sisters, are not less important (take them as evidences of greater genius, or as instruments of mere accomplished art, just as you like) than the still further advance in these respects of her younger and greater sister, Miss Rossetti. Nay, her own record, without any “rascally comparison,” shows this. “Lord Walter's Wife” (that remarkable piece which Thackeray had to relinquish, as Scott had to spoil *St Ronan's Well*, owing to other people's prudery) is not in the least inferior to “Lady Geraldine's Courtship” as an example of nineteenth-century prosody. It has simply got itself free from the preposterous diction of the earlier example. And the “Great God Pan” is not less impossible than the “Romaunt of Margret” to conceive as having been “versed” in the eighteenth century.

But Mr. Arnold, almost in spite of himself, is one of the strongest witnesses to the present point. I do not say that any distinct prosodic utterance of his (we have, as has been said, very few such outside the hexameter question) conflicts with his practice in metre as Wordsworth's utterances as to diction conflict with his practice in diction itself. But I do say, after long and repeated study of it, that his whole critical attitude and tendency—his choice of authorities, and his selection of instances to condemn—make for preference of a few metres, if not of a single metre, as regards the general practice of the poet, and for restriction of variety to the most rigidly lyric, nay "melic," occasions. What are the facts? He has, as we have seen, a command, fine at its best though uncertain and not very varied, of one great staple metre in blank verse, but he uses it rather seldom and at no great length. Even for occasions of "pith and moment," narrative or quasi-narrative in character, he employs either mixtures of epic and lyric measures, or lyrical measures pure and simple. In such pieces as the "Church of Brou" and "Tristram and Iseult" he actually, in a fashion quite contrary to the practice and principles of the ancients, employs a *satura* of metres. And the great bulk of his work, including a still larger portion of his best, is in lyric or quasi-lyric form, varied as far as his own special qualities and defects will allow him to vary it. In short, the spirit of the time is too strong for him.

It is the same with all the minors who are worth consideration, for we need not take into that consideration the producers of unreadable epics, sacred or profane, the Sothebys and the Atherstones and the Herauds, the Pollocks and the Bickersteths, who labour at impossible masses of soporific verse. The real poets take to prosodic variety by nature, or are driven to it by necessity, and they illustrate it as best they can. It may be in serious verse, like Kingsley, in deliberately comic verse, like Barham and Locker, in exercises of ironic romance and humorous melancholy, like Thackeray. But always they illustrate it.

It may seem to be outside the duty of the present history to discuss, at any length, the beneficent or maleficent effect of this pressure of the time, but I do not think it can be regarded as wholly superfluous or at all improper. The estimate of the total "clear profits" added to the stock of English poetry by the generation of Tennyson and Browning must, of course, largely depend upon the general principles of poetic criticism adopted by the valuer—on the question whether he is a subject-man or a treatment-man, whether he believes in the Poetic Moment, or whether he refuses to take it into consideration, except as a heresy. But although I have seen more strange things in criticism than perhaps most men have, and can there see nothing so strange but that my critical fancy, as Mr Swinburne says of something else in "*Félice*,"

Can dream of worse,

I can hardly imagine any tolerably competent and impartial judge, even now, denying that the addition is, at least, considerable. And when that addition is duly considered, it will, I believe I may say without fear of valid contradiction, be found further, that the matter concerned takes more various forms in general, and more free and versatile forms in particular, than the admitted treasures of any other period of English literature, with the sole exception, and that not a certain one, of the great Elizabethan age, in its major circumscription of 1580-1660. Now whether this is a mere coincidence, or whether it is there as connection of causation, may not be certain to anybody but God, and so I shall not presume to be certain of it myself. But at least I may say, without rashness, that there are few things of which I am more certain than that the prosodic variety and the poetic goodness *are* connected—and that of necessity.

It need perhaps only be added that to the great poetical differentia of nineteenth-century poetry—the immense increase of combined audible and visual appeal—this variety of prosodic construction necessarily contributes almost as immensely. It has the audible appeal



almost to itself, it helps not a little in the visual. The sounds of the measures which we have been chronicling are as the concert of the Plain of Dura to a single pipe or harp, when you compare them to those of eighteenth-century poetry, and the palette of the poetic limner is enriched in an almost equal ratio.

When we turn from practitioners to theorists the result is once more disappointing. The greater part of their attention during this period is bestowed on the hopeless hexameter business. The one really brilliant and virtually sound prosodie study of the middle third of the century is the work, not of an English prosodist, but of an American poet. It is true that the period is not absolutely barren, that it can boast the almost epoch-making work of Guest, but that work itself, while it is *in potentia* a guide forward to the prosodie Jerusalem, is in general intention, in particular opinion, *in actu*, a guide backward to the City of Destruction. You get men like Latham framing barren and inaccurate rules to feed expectant and unsuspecting generations, and men like Evans talking about English verse with an ingenuous confession, on almost every other page, that they have no appreciation whatever of its qualities.

It seems, therefore, hardly necessary to occupy our rapidly decreasing space with general remarks on them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have, I think, seen some protest, though only in one quarter, and in a context which slightly "give to think," against my "Prosodist" chapters as being cursory, flippant, and generally unsatisfactory. I am sorry if they seem so to anybody, but I did not adopt their method hastily, and I am not prepared to alter it. This, I may be permitted to repeat, is a *History of Prosody*, not a "History of Prosodists", and I mention the latter only to the extent necessary to illustrate and explain the progress of the former. To give a complete *prolix* of such books as Steele's, Thelwall's, and many others, would hopelessly overload a craft which is already pretty deep in the water. It would be of very slight benefit to any but students specialising to such an extent that they may reasonably be expected to consult the books for themselves—a consultation which I have facilitated as much as possible. And large, if not lavish, information already exists on the subject in the works of Mr. Ormond, which do not duplicate mine, and which I feel no inclination or obligation to duplicate in my turn more than is strictly necessary. Lastly, the discussion of what other people have said about something appears to me to have occupied, and to be occupying, far too much space in recent and current literature, and, once more, I desire to contribute to it only what strict necessity requires.

BOOK XI  
THE LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY



## CHAPTER I

### THE PRÆ-RAPHAELITE SCHOOL

Distribution and nomenclature—*Differentia*\* general, and particular—D G Rossetti—"The Blessed Damozel"—Various poems—His sonnets and the later sonnet generally—William Morris his prosodic importance—The verse in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*—*The Defence of Guenevere*—*The Life and Death of Jason*—Morris's heroics—*The Earthly Paradise*—Its octosyllabics—*Love is Enough*—*Sigurd the Volsung*—*Poems by the Way*—Mr Swinburne his blank verse postponed—*Atalanta in Calydon*—Considerations on it—*Chastelard*—*Poems and Ballads*—*Laus Veneris*—Various forms—The "Dolores" metre—Other books *A Song of Italy* and *Songs before Sunrise*—The second *Poems and Ballads*—"At a Month's End"—The later volumes—The blank verse—The couplets of *Tristram*—The long metres—Miss Rossetti *Goblin Market*—The title poem—Her later books—Sonnets and general quality—Canon Dixon—*Mano* and its metre—O'Shaughnessy *The Epic of Women*—The "Barcarolle"—*Lays of France*—*Songs of a Worker*—*Music and Moonlight*—James Thomson II

THERE may be some difference of opinion on the question whether the English poetry of the last third of the nineteenth century can be separated from that of the middle third (using these fractional terms with literary laxity, and not with mathematical correctness) even as much as this middle division can be separated from the first. Not merely is the productive existence of Tennyson and Browning, for much more than half of it, a serious impediment to any such segregation, but it is impossible to say that their younger contemporaries differ from them, even in the not very strongly marked way in which they differ from their own elders. Nevertheless some difference, of special if not generic kind, is sensible, and it is certainly

Distribution  
and  
nomenclature

not less sensible than elsewhere in the particular domain of prosody

A special name, however, for this period is rather wanting, even for the remarkable group who began to publish between the very late fifties and the very early seventies, no quite satisfactory term has been invented. There has been a certain habit of calling the verse of the Rossettis, Mr Morris, and Mr Swinburne "Præ-Raphaelite" poetry. There is more reason for it than the fact that the eldest member, and in a way the master of the group, was a painter, and a Præ-Raphaelite painter. For the whole group and their followers did, in respect to poetry, exactly what their congeners did in respect to art: they went back to more primitive types of model than even "those about Tennyson" had chosen, and exhibited this reversion in no way more than in the prosodic. But, after all, tickets, though convenient, are unnecessary. I shall deal in this chapter with the four poets just named, adding to them that very remarkable verse-smith Mr O'Shaughnessy, Canon Dixon, who, for "one thing that he did," if not for others, could not be omitted, and James Thomson the Second, but reserving for the next chapter those other contemporaries whom death has exposed to my operations.<sup>1</sup>

*Differentia*  
general.

One very strong differentia of this school (using the word "school" under caution) from all previous ones in the English poetry of the last two centuries, is, besides the decided reversion to older forms of our own literature, the extension to both modern and older forms of other literatures. The influence of the Elizabethans had, of course, been powerful upon the first nineteenth-century division, and that of German, though slight, was present in some degree. But they had seldom gone farther back or farther afield in the literary sense, even Scott's attraction for ballad and romance being rather an intense

<sup>1</sup> If it were not impossible to mention everybody, the list might, even here, be slightly enlarged—as, for instance, by the name of Thomas Gordon Halk, a forerunner, to some extent, of the Præ-Raphaelites, and a remarkable handler of their statelier movements, who was stimulated to fresh production after 1870.

kinship of nature, and a fortunate familiarity of acquaintance, than a deliberately literary cult. Nor had much advance in this respect been made by immediate predecessors. Tennyson may have been introduced by J. H. Kemble to Anglo-Saxon in some degree, and had read his Malory and his Chaucer, but he does not seem to have gone much further, while foreign literary influence of this kind on him, whether old or new, is simply non-existent. Browning, often foreign in subject, is hardly at all so in manner, and though Mr. Arnold, despising French poetry, and almost contemptuously ignorant of mediæval, affected to think highly of German, he imitated little of it but its rhymelessness.

On the other hand, Rossetti—three-quarters of an <sup>and poet</sup> Italian by blood, and re-Italianated yet more by his predilections for and in art—was an eager student and a matchless translator of the early poets of his ancestral land, with no small bent, from his general mediævalism, to those of France and England. Morris was simply a person who had somehow got knocked off the bridge of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, into some limbo where he kept the influence of Chaucer's art and Langland's politics, with the decorative instincts of a designer of Books of Hours, and the chivalric predilections of Froissart, ready to be crossed into curious hybrid by nineteenth-century influences. Mr. Swinburne's bent was rather towards French and the Renaissance than towards Italian or English mediævalism, but this last was not alien from him, while, like a true child of the Renaissance itself, he united with these the classical scholarship which the others could not boast. And all these things were seen of them in their prosody as elsewhere. Miss Rossetti was her brother's sister, with the addition of that influence of the Oxford Movement which was for a time powerful on Morris, and for a longer time on Dixon. O'Shaughnessy was again French in the main.

Rossetti's extraordinary ambidexterity in the two <sup>D G</sup> forms of line, with sound added in the one case and colour in the other, was illustrated as early as the original

"The Blessed  
Damozel"

appearance of "The Blessed Damozel" itself in the *Germ* for February 1850. There is nothing schematically very singular in the metre of this great poem, which<sup>1</sup> is merely common measure prolonged to a six with an extra couplet, the eights being not rhymed at all, the sixes rhymed together. The effect of this recurrent rhyme is indeed a peculiar one, and the slightly weird insistence which is noticeable with the simple triplet, in such poems as *The Two Voices* and *A Vision of Poets*, is rather enforced than weakened by the interspaced blanks. But I do not know that it can be said, merely as a metre, to carry with it, or even to suggest, much other definite property or endowment. And, of course, great part of the miraculous charm of the piece is due to the way in which Rossetti, like his mighty godfather, forces actual pictures on your eyes—the Damozel herself in the dread serenity of her outlook on space, and the great features of the prospect. But this metre is made to serve the purposes of the pencil in a way that is miraculous. The customary separation of the couplets, the rare overrunning with strong pause in the subsequent line, and the sparing but unhesitating use of the trisyllabic foot, vindicate this claim, and the famous touchstone-stanza of the handmaidens of Mary exemplifies the usage.<sup>2</sup> The very article in the second line is a mystery, for if you omit it, substituting, say, "blessed" for "*the* lady," and lose the trisyllabic foot, the beauty will be half gone. But the heart of that

<sup>1</sup> The Blessed Damozel leaned out  
From the gold bar of heaven,  
Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
Of waters stilled at even  
She had three lilies in her hand,  
And the stars in her hair were seven

It may, of course, also be taken as merely colourably broken fifteneers in triplet—the chief advantage of which is the striking "parall[el] unparalleled" with Orm. But it also has a bearing on the rhymelessness of 1, 3, and 5

<sup>2</sup> We two, she said, will seek the groves  
Where the Lady Mary is,  
With her five handmaidens, whose names  
Are five sweet symphonies—  
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,  
Margaret and Rosalys

mystery is in the five names—a symphony of symphonies which you cannot alter without disturbing, without destroying, the effect. If you change the places of “Margaret” and “Magdalen,” “Rosalys” and “Cecily,” you will comply with the bare scheme, but you will very much lessen the music. If you take a dissyllabic saint for Margaret you will do worse still, though you choose the prettiest name left in the Calendar. The strong cretic—not mere dactylic—value of “Magdalen[e]” will be thrown away if you change her with “Cecily.” If you meddle with the order in any way (I have tried several) you will lose the perfect harmony of consonant and vowel arrangement.

He always had this “science of names,” whereof Milton and Hugo are “the first of those who know,” and he showed it again and again, especially in “Rose Mary”, but it was very far indeed from being his only prosodic mastery. The refrain will of course suggest itself this eminently mediæval thing was naturally a favourite with the whole school, and it as naturally attracted stupid ridicule from stupid people, and clever and humorous parody from clever and good-humoured ones. But I do not think he was so happy with it as was Morris. Of <sup>various</sup> the statelier forms of “broken and cuttit” verse he was a <sup>poems</sup> great master. “Love’s Nocturn,” and “The Staff and Scrip,” and “The Stream’s Secret” yield to few things in this way. In fact, save his less elaborate ballad measures (which have not quite enough of the wilding about them), what did he not make well in verse? We have several times noted the special virtues of monorhymed batches—triplets or quatrains waisted and tailed with otherwise-rhyming lines. Almost a new tone is brought out in “The Burden of Nineveh,” where the persistence of the rhymes impresses the steady sarcastic moral. The blank verse “Last Confession” is good, and has an original touch, and the ever-obliging-but-not-to-be-quite-trusted-to-run-alone octosyllable could not do, <sup>its</sup> work better than in “Jenny” continuously, and in <sup>the</sup> “White Ship” by separate couplets and triplets. <sup>indeed</sup>



actually used the *In Memoriam* metre before the publication of *In Memoriam*, but it cannot be said that he was master of it, we have seen that nobody before Tennyson was<sup>1</sup> Not a few of his songs are in marvellous measure The way in which the pulsing blood-throbs of the opening couplets of "Love-Lily" ripple out into the stiller and more continuous flow of the rest of the stanza is almost unparalleled,<sup>2</sup> and not less so the hopeless thuds of "The Woodspurge," the swinging anapaests of the "Song of the Bower," and the perfected use of that *In Memoriam* septet, which was noticed above, in "The Sea Limits"<sup>3</sup> And then there are his sonnets

<sup>1</sup> In one of the songs of the "House of Life" he turned it into a very effective septet by making the fourth line start a fresh round *V inf*

<sup>2</sup> Between the hands, || between the brows, ||  
Between the lips || of Love-Lily,  
A spir it is born || whose birth endows ||  
My blood with fire || to burn through me,  
Who breathes | upon | my gra|zing eyes, |  
Who laughs | and mur|murs in | mine ear, |  
At whose | least touch | my col|our flies,  
And whom | my life | grows faint | to hear

I have ventured here to indicate by signs what I have often described as "fingering" in the text The foot arrangement is inviolable and unviolated, but the poet, in his passion, borrows all the division *round* of the first and third, in the first two lines, to bestow it on the deeper pauses at "hands," and "brows," and "lips" There is still a stronger central pause, though less of it, in 3 and 4, while 5 to 8 run almost equally For the way in which this "fingering" of the pervading and indestructible foot system has led to will-worships of fancy prosody, *v inf*

<sup>3</sup> Master of the murmuring courts  
Where the shapes of sleep convene,  
Lo! my spirit here exhorts  
All the powers of thy demesne,  
For their aid to woo my queen  
What reports  
Yield thy jealous courts unseen?

(*Love's Nocturn*)

(I pronounce "demesne" myself, but Rossetti was probably thinking of the legal *mesne*)

The wind flapped loose, the wind was still,  
Shaken out dead from tree and hill,  
I had walked on at the wind's will,  
I sat now, for the wind was still

Between my knees my forehead was,  
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!  
My hair was over in the grass,  
My naked ears heard the day pass

The nineteenth century saw so great and continuous a reblossoming of the sonnet that it would hardly be sufficient to make notice of Wordsworth the only place—or even notices of Wordsworth and Keats the only major places—for comment upon its later developments. It should, of course, be noted that neither Shelley, nor Tennyson, nor Browning, nor Mr. Swinburne uses it much,<sup>1</sup> and the comparative abstinence may in each case be traced to something of the poet's prosodic, as well as to something of his general poetic, character. On the other hand, we have noted how, just as it supplied tonic and styptic in the early sixteenth century to Wyatt and Surrey, so in the mid-nineteenth it exercised the same beneficent agencies on Mrs. Browning. Tennyson's elder brother, Charles Tennyson-Turner, after his earliest ventures, kept almost the whole of his share of the poetic energy, so largely developed in the family, to the sonnet form, and his work in it, though never reaching consummateness, has as much adequacy as is possible in a medium which almost necessitates consummateness in order to be adequate. Some of Hartley Coleridge's

His sonnets  
and the later  
sonnet  
generally

My eyes, wide open, had the run  
Of some ten weeds to fix upon,  
Among those few out of the sun,  
The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one

From perfect grief there need not be  
Wisdom or even memory  
One thing, then learnt, remains to me—  
The woodspurge has a cup of three

(*The Woodspurge*)

Consider the sea's listless chime,  
Time's self it is, made audible  
The murmur of the earth's own shell—  
Secret continuance sublime

Is the sea's end, our sight may pass  
No furlong further Since time was  
This sound hath told the lapse of time

(*The Sea Limits*)

But you must add to those quoted and mentioned "Sudden Light," and "Penumbra," and "Alas! so long" (a wonderful mixture). And, in fact, it will be simplest and most satisfactory to add Rossetti's *Poems*.

<sup>1</sup> I must invite attention to this "much," for of course they all use it—Mr. Swinburne most. But in his case the quality is scarcely of his best, and in the other three the quantity is of their least.

sonnets are very fine in the English variety, and the famous "singleton" of Blanco White on "Night" ranks high among the rather numerous examples of single song in this particular kind. Wadé in his *Mundi et Cordis*<sup>1</sup> is very nearly a great master of the quatorzain, and there are many others noteworthy. But on the whole the Rossettis, Dante and Christina, occupy the place of honour, be it last or first according to arrangement, in this Masque of the later Nineteenth-Century Sonnet.

That they had it, by kind, may seem an obvious statement, but obvious statements are not those least worth making. In the Petrarchian form, at any rate, I am not acquainted with many English sonnets, save theirs, which do not either ring somehow false, or, as in Milton's case and some of Wordsworth's, ring true, but with an effect which is not entirely that of the pure sonnet. The main reason why it is so fatally foolish to attempt to ostracise the English form is that it, and it alone, really *translates*—that is to say, transfers the Italian effect in English. In sonnet, as in tercet, the entirely different character of the double rhyme when present, and the want of it when absent, defeat the attempt to reproduce the Italian form exactly.

But Rossetti is the magician, though his magic is not easy to spell out. It is not that he always adopts outlandish diction, for no poet can write purer or more vernacular English. He certainly uses that enjambment of the thirteenth line which the Italian form specially needs, rather more freely than Milton or Wordsworth, but both of them do use it, and he can get the effect equally well with the opposite device—that of an unusually strong pause at the end of this line. One open secret is that he adopts the octave-and-sextet division more frankly and fearlessly than most English poets before him, yet in his sonnets for pictures, where no ἀγγίστροφον

<sup>1</sup> It is usual to complete this truncation by *Carmina*. The actual title of the book (London, 1835), which is worth possessing, is *Mundi et Cordis De Rebus Sempternis et Temporalis Carmina*.

of meaning is required, he sometimes relinquishes this division altogether. Nor again, though these picture sonnets are justly famous, and illustrate his ambidexterity in the most heart-easing manner, is he less successful in the sonnet meditative, or what may be called the sonnet narrative, as in that famous "Nuptial Sleep" into which some critical swine have read their own foulness, but which is an altogether glorious thing in poetry and prosody alike, or the great pendant of

O ye! all ye, that walk in Willow-wood

I think that, though it may be again obvious, the philosophic mind will be wisely content with the suggestion that the extremely *plastic* character of the sonnet, meeting with a genius skilled at divers forms of plasticity, found itself in exceptionally right hands. I do not know how it may be with others, but for myself I never feel happy when in a sonnet, one line projects very far beyond the mere page-outline of the whole, or if one takes disproportionate share of ear-attention to itself, or if the line-divisions, whatever their overlapping in sense, do not observe a distinct individuality. It is here more than ever or anywhere necessary, not merely that the wine be good, but that the bottle be fitly moulded, the cup chased with sculpturesque perfection. Now, that Rossetti gives this care both to chalice and flagon few people will deny. His choice of implements and material is large. He will become ultra-Elizabethan in alliteration, as with

And in regenerate rapture turns my face  
Upon the devious coverts of dismay,

will hurry motion to carry off weight in

How passionately and irretrievably,

will even risk, triumphantly, dangerous internal rhyme in the same sonnet, one of the very finest of his picture-pieces, "Sibylla Palmifera" <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Under the arch of Life, where love and death,  
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw  
Beauty enthroned, and though her gaze struck awe,  
I drew it in as simply as my breath.

In what fond flight, how many ways and days !

He is very fond of strong, indeed full-stop pauses, things as effective in this form as they are dubious in the Shakespearian. But in fact there is no end to the ways in which hand and soul work together in these sonnets of his

William  
Morris  
his prosodic  
importance

The prosody of William Morris is a subject of unusual importance and interest, not merely because of its own wide-ranging quality and quantity, but because of the singular misapprehensions which seem to have been sometimes entertained about it, as about its author's poetic position generally. These misapprehensions are, to tolerably experienced students of life and letters, only another example of the great and grisly doctrine of compensation. Two of Morris's long poems, *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*, happened to enjoy a popularity which (putting aside mere sports of the gods, and exhibitions of human imbecility in writer and reader, like *Proverbial Philosophy* and the *Epic of Hades*) has hardly been enjoyed by anything of equal length since the great days of Scott and Byron. But he seems to have paid for this by the diffusion of a vague yet almost omnipresent idea of him as a sort of *improvisatore*, not contemptible, but not to be taken seriously. One may even fear that the solemn folly which frequently affects "both the great vulgar and the small" has made not a few people feel satisfied that a man who manufactured pretty wall-papers and fine stained glass must be a manufacturer also, and "merely decorative," in poetry.

The extreme injustice and shortsightedness of this

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Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath  
The sky and sea, bend o'er thee—which can draw  
By sea, or sky, or woman, to one law  
The allotted burden of her palm and wreath  
This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise  
Thy voice and hand shake still—long known to thee  
By flying hair and fluttering hem—the beat  
Following her duly of thy heart and feet,  
How passionately and irretrievably  
In what fond flight, how many ways and days !

(sometimes manifesting itself in the most unexpected places), from the point of view of general poetic criticism, is not within the purview of the present court, but it will take no liberty, and exceed no powers, in quashing the judgment as far as prosody is concerned, let further appeal lie where it may. We shall not have the slightest difficulty in showing that, for variety and idiosyncrasy of important metres, and for management of that variety, Morris was quite exceptionally noteworthy, and that the *polymetric* character of the century, on which we have so much insisted, and the multiplicity of means and methods with which this multitude of metres has been handled, find hardly a more remarkable exponent among that century's very greatest poets.

The faculty that came by nature, and the education that was the gift of fortune, are both illustrated in the few verse-contributions to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*<sup>1</sup>. The scraps in *The Hollow Land*—"Queen Mary's crown was gold," "Christ keep the Hollow Land," etc., are significant enough. To use one of the symbols of the book, which I venture to borrow for the motto of this volume, "Mary Rings!" We have got the real English strain of fifteenth-century carol back in an English mouth of the nineteenth, with no mere *pastiche*, with no simulated cognisances and false pedigrees, but true blood and bone, with nothing more than the slight difference of the centuries themselves. So few people really read Middle English romance and fifteenth-century oddments, that I have known critics of worship talk of Morris's "Wardour Street." "Wardour Street in their throats!" as the Duke of Savoy said more crudely and belatedly to the *marchand de Paris*. Morris writes as Thomas Chester would have written if he had been born far on in the nineteenth century, and had had the poets from Wyatt to Tennyson before him, yet had retained his original *ethos*. But gift and double education show

<sup>1</sup> I was lucky enough to come across this now "unfindable" treasure in a country rectory, when I was quite a boy, and only four or five years after its appearance. But few things of the kind recently have been more satisfactory than the reprint of Morris's part (London, 1903).

themselves, more elaborately and variously, of course, in the few substantive verse-contributions to the periodical even before they (or some of them) were collected and reappeared in *The Defence of Guenevere*. The two "together-weather" pieces, and the earlier "Rapunzel" song under her happier name of "Guendolen," show it, but "The Chapel in Lyonesse" is the place "where comfort is." The dreamy agony of its cadence all through, the shortening of the last lines of the quatrains, the pendulum change of iamb and trochee, and the extensions of stanza

Ah me ! I cannot fathom it,

and the other longer one which ends

Now I begin to fathom it !

are all very choice things<sup>1</sup>

*The Defence  
of Guenevere*

There were, however, few ears to hear the music when a larger body of it was mustered and issued in 1858. Not only was English criticism then but just recovering from its decadence after the great period of Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt, but the very agencies under which the recovery was being effected—those of Matthew Arnold and of the *Saturday Review*—were as much opposed to work like Morris's as they were to each other. There might be "young persons growing up for" it, but most of them were "in short frocks," or, to make it consistent to fact, in short jackets.

Yet it was there, for whoso would and could, to hear. The very terza of the *Defence* itself is one of the most remarkable examples of that metre in English (*v inf* on Canon Dixon's *Mano*), though the usual final quatrain shows the odd jolt or shrug of relief—appropriate here, as it happens, to the meaning—with which English verse welcomes its release from the alien measure, and which one never feels in Italian.<sup>2</sup> And the continuous

<sup>1</sup> Suggestion from "The Lady of Shalott" (for which we know that Morris had a special admiration) was doubtless present, but the prosodic motive is differently handled.

<sup>2</sup> Here are the three last stanzas

"All I have said is truth, by Christ's dear tears,"  
She would not speak another word, but stood  
Turn'd sideways, listening, like a man who hears

fours of "King Arthur's Tomb" are far finer, though the substance is not quite so good, and the exaggerated archaism of the diction (for it *is* sometimes exaggerated) carries quaintness to affectation. "The Chapel in Lyonesse" reappears, and then we have the remarkable blanks of "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" with the more remarkable lyrical *panache* or "tip" to them<sup>1</sup>. It is most curious to compare these blanks with those of Mr Swinburne's nearly contemporary *Queen Mother*. Elizabethan, especially Elizabethan dramatic, influence, was never strong on Morris, and while in the younger poet we see already the familiar congeniality which has shown itself since in nearly fifty years of prose as well as verse, the basis of Morris's blank verse is perhaps Tennysonian. But there is a strong element of difference in it—not impossibly supplied by Browning, of whom, strikingly as their tastes and gifts were contrasted, Morris was also an early student and admirer. Indeed, I should call it more dramatic than Tennyson's. Perhaps it was this very quality which made him afterwards use it so little for narrative, but anyhow it is interesting.

Yet the principal charm, prosodically, of the piece is the little lyric coda of "*placebo* and *dirige*" for Launcelot. Here, once more, you have the carol-tone which nobody but Scott in "Proud Maisie" had got before. "Mary Rings" again, though not as a tocsin here. She rings once more, and with wonderfully varied bobs and changes, in "Rapunzel," where the old "Guendolen" song finds itself thoroughly at home. The variety here, and the success of it, are both extraordinary, and any critic not subject-besotted, or else under the influence of some of the

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His brother's trumpet sounding through the wood  
Of his foe's lances. She lean'd eagerly  
And gave a slight spring sometimes as she could

At last hear something really, joyfully  
Her cheek grew crimson, as the headlong speed  
Of the iron charger drew all men to see,  
The knight who came was Launcelot at good need

<sup>1</sup> Therefore be it believed  
Whatsoever he grieved, etc



contemporary manias which Arnold, sound on these geese though not on others, gibed at in his famous preface, ought to have been struck by them. The trio—a duo rather, with a chorus—of Prince, Witch, and Rapunzel, shows wonderful felicity of integral and contrasted prosodic character. The prince's long soliloquy in decasyllabic quatrain has the dream-quality which Morris had already exhibited in the pieces mentioned, but in Rapunzel's octosyllabic couplets he has not yet quite reached the mastery of that form that he was afterwards to attain. The lovers' return to the quatrain, and the contrasted trio of the end, repeating the measure of the opening, but with the chorus-witch's note of despair instead of triumph, complete the whole. I really do not know when anybody had used such a concerted piece in metre.

I should like to mention every item in a book which has never yet had justice done to it, but that is impossible. Something, I suppose, must be said of the numerous refrain-pieces as such, especially as I said little of Rossetti's, and shall not say much of Mr Swinburne's. The singular wrath and ridicule which they excited at the time, and for some time after, has long died away, as well as the retaliatory *engouement* which wrath and ridicule of this kind always produce. To me the refrain, though it be of the oldest house, and probably came over with Rowena and the wassail cup and other seductive things and persons, is simply like all prosodic matters—and in fact like all matters—to be judged by its works. A bad refrain is a bad thing—specially bad, perhaps, because it comes often. A good refrain is a good thing, and certainly not less good for the same reason. In his French examples Morris is less happy than if he had been a little more of a scholar. I doubt whether he knew the value of the final *e*.

*Ha ' Ha ' la belle jaune giroflée,*

though it tips an octosyllabic triplet, *may*, though I very strongly suspect it was not, have been intended to be an extension to ten. But

Ah ! qu'elle est belle, la Marguerite,

though pretty otherwise, is quite hopeless either as eight or ten Except in burlesque French verse, you can't make "bel~~le~~" = "bel'" before "la"

This, however, is a small matter The English and Latin examples are generally excellent, and for my own part I have always been fervently attached to what is usually regarded as the worst offender<sup>1</sup>—

Two red roses across the moon,

and to the admirable gallop and skirmish of the anapaests behind them in each stanza The piece is excellent morally, a man may take a worse life-motto than—

Because, forsooth, the battle was set,  
And the scarlet and blue had got to be met,

and I seldom see a very white full moon without two red roses across it, enriching my "decorative-imaginative nature-sense," as some would say But the rush and the hand-gallop of the poem are quite independent of these things

"Golden Wings" has, in the title part of it, a remarkable extension of the refrain principle, "gold" occurring frequently outside the actual line of "Gold wings across the sea", and the body is also remarkable as an attempt to use *In Memoriam* metre for narrative But "The Wind" and "The Blue Closet," both of which are refrain poems of a peculiar character, and the last piece "In Prison," deserve special attention

In "The Wind" Morris obtains a great effect by the strong contrast of the swinging equivalenced anapaestic trimeter (wherein lay for him great possibilities yet untried) with the "wheel" of the refrain—a blend of octosyllabic couplet unusually valued, and Alexandrine<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quite recently these poor rosy charges on the argent shield have proved themselves as rags, not roses, to generally celestial minds

<sup>2</sup> Ah ! no, no, it is nothing, surely nothing at all,  
Only the wild going wind round by the garden wall,  
For the dawn just now is breaking, the wind beginning to fall  
*Wind, wind, thou art sad, art thou kind ?*  
*Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,*  
*Yet still thou wanderest the lily-sad to find*

It is by consent of good wits<sup>1</sup> the *ne plus ultra* of that "eeriness" in which he has no rival but Poe, and it is of a rarer quality than anything but Poe's very best. "The Blue Closet" is an experiment of the concerted kind in *Christabel*<sup>2</sup> metre designedly *mixed*, i.e. alternately kept close to the iambic extremity or expanded to the anapæstic with "common" addition—and one of no little success. While for combination of simplicity and success in suiting sound to sense it will not be easy to surpass "In Prison,"<sup>3</sup> even if every possible suggestion is debited to it. Matthew Arnold, in one of the most natural things he ever said in his life, remarked, when asked to select his poems, that he should like to select them all. Once more I should like to do the same with this little brown book. But it may not be. It is enough to say that there is in it, prosodically speaking, trumpet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music. Which they that have not ears to hear, let them not hear.

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He has the boldness—sure sign of a great prosodist instructed and practised, if not also theoretic—to reduce his long lines, with rare but striking effect, to the bare Alexandrine norm, as in

I knew them by the arms that I was used to paint

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Andrew Lang's Introduction to Poe in the "Parchment Library" edition (London, 1881).

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps I should rather say "February," for Morris follows Spenser in becoming sometimes purely decasyllabic. Thus he has not merely—

Alice the Queen and Louise the Queen,  
Two damozels wearing purple and green,

and

From day to day and year to year,  
And there is none to let us go,

but spells of

Or did they strangle him as he lay there  
With the long scarlet scarf I used to wear?

<sup>3</sup> Wearily, drearily,  
Half the day long,  
Flap the great banners  
High over the stone  
Strangely and eerily  
Sounds the wind's song  
Bending the banner-poles

Lie I, with life all dark,  
Feet tethered, hands fettered,  
Fast to the stone,  
The gum walls square lettered  
With prison'd men's groan

Still strain the banner-poles  
Through the wind's song,  
Westward the banner rolls  
Over my wrong

While all alone—  
Watching the loophole's spark,

The evidence of this book ought to have been sufficient, but it was largely strengthened, in a way which should have been effective, even upon those who consider lyrics trifles and refrains puerile, by the poet's next publication. After nearly a decade—a decade which saw perhaps the most momentous change in the prevailing attitude to literature and art which had been seen for half a century, and a more momentous one than was to be seen for another half—Morris produced (1867) *The Life and Death of Jason*. But he did not produce it in blank verse, and he did not produce it in any kind of stanza. He went back to the long-disused heroic couplet, not of course to the stopped form, but to the enjambed, of a kind nearer to that of Browne and Wither than to that of Keats, and in fact quite astonishingly like that of "Alresford Pool"<sup>1</sup>. Yet it was much less deliberately modelled on these seventeenth-century writers than a natural derivative from Chaucerian verse itself, which, it must be remembered, has a strong tendency to enjambment. He varied the metre a little, especially with octosyllables such as the extraordinarily beautiful "Nymphs' Song to Hylas," which he afterwards republished separately in *Songs by the Way*. But these are the merest exceptions, though they become of much importance in reference to what followed. The heroic is enough for this paragraph. It is almost sufficient to pronounce it, and it may be safely pronounced, the best example of the decidedly, but not excessively, enjambed couplet that we have. If there is less poetic quintessence than in *Endymion*, the workmanship is far more level and sustained, and there are no "mawkish" extravagances in diction. Moreover, the writer has effectually guarded against the sort of narrative imbroglio in which *Marmion* and *Chalkhill*, Chamberlayne and Keats himself, had allowed their measure to engage them<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *V. sup.* n. 123

<sup>2</sup> The first Lord Lytton's skit in *Kenelm Chillingly*—

Sophronia was a nice

Girl,

etc., is good fun and fair criticism of the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood* type. But

*The Life and  
Death of Jason*  
—Morris's  
heroics

*The Earthly Paradise*

In passing from *Jason* to *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-70) it is important to remember that the interval between the publication of the two was very short, and that the *Paradise* (with slight variation in the stories to be included) is announced as "in preparation" on the fly-leaf of *Jason* itself. But in the first volume, as well as in the others which followed it with such extraordinary rapidity,<sup>1</sup> considering the bulk and the goodness of the work they contained, Morris by no means confined himself to this fresh and admirable vehicle of verse-narrative. It does indeed, and no wonder, form something like the "piece of resistance," the cut-and-come-again of the abundant feast, being employed not merely in the delightful Prologue, but in the "Aerisius," "Alcestis," "Cupid and Psyche," and "Ogier the Dane" chapters of the first volume, as well as in many others later, especially the "Lovers of Gudrun," which some think the finest of all, and the "Bellerophon" pieces. No wonder, for it is nearly impossible to imagine a finer narrative medium, if the narrative is made the first object. Nor should it be forgotten that, on the just artistic principle of continuing the interposed joints in the same outline as the frame, the "Month" pieces (containing some of the best poetry of the whole) are also in couplet partly, though the poet has recognised the need of something more, for that best poetry, by adding stanza-doublets, as it were, in some cases.

## Its octosyllabics

The stanza itself, however, in various forms, holds also a very considerable place in the text of the book, though, true to that curious lack of Elizabethanism which has been noticed, he never tries the Spenserian.<sup>2</sup> Nor did he

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although it would be a pity if Sophronia's niceness and her girlhood were separated in life, there is not the least reason why they should not be divided in line.

<sup>1</sup> I was out of England at the time of its appearance, and therefore possess only the *third* edition (still 1868) of the first (double) volume, my third and fourth are of their first.

<sup>2</sup> Going a very little beyond my last, I may briefly note how very curious the difference between Morris and Spenser is. Never, perhaps, were two poets "so near and so far."

favour the octave, perhaps instinctively feeling something of that doubt of it for serious purposes which I have more than once expressed. In rhyme-royal, however, he is extremely felicitous. "Atalanta's Race" gave early proof of his skill in the great old metre of *Troilus*, and it has many other exemplifications, the greatest and the last being the splendid "Hill of Venus."

But neither of these things, good as both are, seems to me to be Morris's chief prosodic achievement as yet. I find this in the strangely and delightfully "refreshed" octosyllabics in which he has clothed most of what seem to me the best things in the book. "The Watching of the Falcon," the incomparable "Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon," and the "Ring given to Venus." With the unciring instinct of the great prosodic poets he has caught, made fast, and developed a form and function of this oldest of pure English metres which had scarcely ever been achieved before, save by Gower in the *Medea* passage, and by Keats in the "Eve of St Mark." Besides having followed the English octosyllable from its shell-chip in Layamon right downwards, I happen to have been, for very many years, familiar with all the best examples of it, in Old French from the time of Chrétien de Troyes, and in the Middle High German poets. I think that in the foregoing pages, while its varieties have been fairly surveyed, its merits have been heartily championed, and its drawbacks frankly allowed for. Among these last we may here specially insist on a certain lack of what may be called (taking different analogies) atmosphere, perfume, echo, suggestion, *nuance*, or, as wine-tasters call it, "finish," in their technical sense. It is, especially in long narrative pieces (for in short the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries can plead exceptions), so short itself, it trips along so lightly, that it leaves little impression on any of the senses of the mind. There are few marked, and therefore fewer accumulated, imprints, touches, reminiscences of the vanished "fingering." This does not matter in the lighter kind of work, and therefore the octosyllable is eminently suited for that, though it will

be remembered that Butler<sup>1</sup> has to resort to special devices to give it bite and sting even here. Chaucer, it may be remembered again, never uses it for anything really serious, his best example, *The House of Fame*, is, in its best part, almost satiric. Scott, to come to modern times, does not aim at this kind of poetic after-touch, and Byron can only substitute for it (except perhaps in *Parisina*, if not even there) his strong positive effects of rhetoric, "finished" in the other sense and direction.

Morris knew something better, and there is not the least doubt that he knew also the passages of Gower and of Keats that I have mentioned. But though he could not have taken from Chaucer the peculiar *aura* of sound of which I have spoken, he may have gathered from him, too, something of the secret of paragraph-management, which is as important in octosyllabics as elsewhere, if not more so, but which the gliding nature of the metre, *in omni volubilis ævum*, is apt to tempt writers to neglect.

Passages of some length are wanted to illustrate successfully the effects of which I am speaking, and the means by which they are reached, but they will be found abundantly in the three pieces which I have named. In the "Falcon" romance—which he has spun so greatly out of Sir John Mandeville's (it may be admitted) great suggestion—the first night of watching, the wonderful little vignette of the falcon itself,<sup>2</sup> the apparition of the lady, the exquisite approach to the curse-laden bliss, and the final vision before the full accomplishment of that curse, are such things as you will not find in the metre anywhere else before—except in the examples noted from the *Confessio* and the lesser "Eve"—combinations of epic and lyric, and practically unique.

<sup>1</sup> *l. sup.* n. 415 *vg.*

<sup>2</sup> And while he thought of this and that  
Upon his perch the falcon sat,  
Unfed, unhooded, his bright eyes  
Beholders of the hard earned prize,  
Glancing around him restlessly  
As though he knew the time drew nigh  
When this long watching should be done

Unique, that is to say, together with those two predecessors and their own fellows "The Land East of the Sun" is so much longer, that its finest passages may stand less conspicuous, but they are certainly not less fine, and it has one special advantage—the slight but cunning countertwist and contrast of the metre, between the dream-narrative, and the interludes where "Gregory the star-gazer" appears in person. I should gladly dwell, but the pages with their stealing steps warn me. And perhaps the finest things of all are in the last, "The Ring given to Venus," a piece which I always like to set against Mérimée's "Vénus d'Ille," in order to get two masterpieces on the same subject, but in polar opposition of tongue, and kind, and temper. I do not in the least mind risking the charge of being a too promiscuous lover, a too frequent repeater of the same phrase, when I say that the long passage<sup>1</sup> describing the procession of the dead gods, and Laurence's journey to the site thereof, is one of the finest things of the kind in English poetry, and that its fineness is very largely due to masterly management—the check and loosening and swing and sway—of the metre. There are twenty pages of it without a break or a falter of craftsmanship, without a weakening or a slackening of spell. And though it may be a mere fancy, I like to think that, in the opening sketch of the minster-close where Palumbus lives, there is a hand pointing to Keats, and, in some touches of the ghostly

<sup>1</sup> Here is some of it

By then his eyes were opened wide.  
Already up the grey hillside  
The hicks of two were turned to him  
One, like a young man tall and slim,  
Whose heels with rosy wings were dight,  
One like a woman clad in white,  
With glittering wings of many a hue,  
Still changing, and whose shape none knew  
In aftertime would Laurence say  
That though the moonshine, cold and grey,  
Flooded the lonely earth that night,  
These creatures in the moon's despite  
Were coloured clear, as though the sun  
Shone through the earth to light each one—  
And terrible was that to see



waiting on the sea-links, a salute of acknowledgment to ancient Gower

*Love is  
Enough*

As we all know, there is interest of instruction and interest of delight, and under the former head, at least, Morris would be interesting to a student of prosody if he had written nothing but the curious book which came next (in 1873) to *The Earthly Paradise*, and was perhaps not quite so Paradisaical. His fifteenth-centuriness, fused with nineteenth, has been noticed, and we have seen how, while writing such riding-rhyme, such rhyme-royal, such octosyllabics as Lydgate and Occleve might have written if they had been very different persons and poets from Occleve and Lydgate, he had absorbed the sweetness of the carollers, and caught the knack of ballad-refrain and stanza-fantasy, from their less-known but better-starred contemporaries. But in *Love is Enough, or the Freeing of Pharamond*, he became, as Nietzsche might say, "fifteenth-century all-too-fifteen-centurish." It is "a morality," and he must needs moral his metrie to suit. It opens with octosyllables, well enough, though more definitely archaized than in *The Earthly Paradise*. And it includes many delightful things, in iambic couplet and long swinging anapaests, with some lovely lyrics<sup>1</sup>. But because it was "a morality" he must needs attempt something like the old rhymeless doggerel, suggesting broken anapaests with a sort of doubled-over trochaic ending, and with more than a suspicion of alliteration. Of this I can only say that I believe some people like it, but that I *don't*. There is a tumbling scramble about it with which I cannot away. It is not only the butter-woman's rank to market,

<sup>1</sup> As this, which is one of my marvels when I read under the shadow of him

Dawn talks to day  
Over dew gleaming flowers,  
Night flies away  
Till the resting of hours  
Fresh are thy feet,  
And with dreams thine eyes glistening—  
Thy still lips are sweet,  
Though the world is a listening

O Love, set a word in my mouth for our meeting,  
Cast thine arms round about me to stay my heart's beating  
O fresh day, O fur day, O long day, made ours!

but the butter-woman's jade has got a loose shoe, and has never been broken to pace<sup>1</sup>

Even those, however, who may agree with me in not thinking this staple metre of *Love is Enough* a very delightful thing for a staple, will, I hope, go on with me to welcome it as a stage in the exploration for a new metre, a stage which, however unsatisfactory in itself, led on to something of extreme satisfaction. The classical part of Morris's inspiration was obviously exhausted, or on the way to exhaustion,<sup>2</sup> the mediæval, always the strongest, was flourishing more than ever—had indeed practically taken up the whole of the ground. He was evidently seeking for some narrative metre which should be as free as possible from classical or modern associations. He had not found it, he could not have found anything continuously tolerable in the lollop of fifteenth-century doggerel, even softened by his own smoothness. But he took from this doggerel the secret that its fifteenth-century manipulators had vainly sought (if indeed they had sensibility enough in their ears to know that it was there), and he produced the splendid metre of *Sigurd the Volsung* (1878)

The exact process by which he hit upon it is to me, *Sigurd the Volsung* even after my almost diabolic wandering up and down the earth of English prosody, and going to and fro in it, uncertain. The places whence it might have come—though no single place<sup>3</sup>—I know well. Its gaffer is of

<sup>1</sup> Such words shall my ghost see the chronicler writing  
In the days that shall be—ah!—what wouldst thou, my fosterling?  
Knowest thou not how words ful us awaking,  
That we seemed to hear plun amid sleep and its sweetness?

It will, of course, be observed that you can also get into or out of it suggestions of amphibrach, pæons of various kinds, ionic *a minore*, and other fleeting constituents of a "tumbling" welter of verse, like the outlines of the eddies in a lasher. Like them it is sometimes, as they are always, soothing, if taken "confusedly" and passively enough.

<sup>2</sup> It never went much into detail, or beyond the "clear colours and stories" of the matter. What made him, even as a whim, double the *c* of "Acontius" and so suggest a dislocation of Ovid's metre, I never could make out. But the slip pans amusingly with the "bel' Marguerite" quoted above.

<sup>3</sup> I mean, of course, as an accomplished and maintained metrical vehicle. Isolated examples occur, in that sporadic fashion which is so precious to us as evidence, quite early. You could not, for instance, have a better, burring the

course the old equivalenced fourteener of *Gamelyn*, with its obvious central stop, and the younger measure "holds to the blood of its clan" unflinchingly in this respect. But its gammer, though of the clan still, is of a different branch of it—that form of the resolved fourteener metre, or ballad couplet, which arranges itself so that the odd lines of the ballad form have a syllable short and a quasi-trochaic ending. When these two are joined there is added, in the next generation, a much larger proportion of anapæstic equivalence than was usual in the old fourteener, or even in *Gamelyn* itself, but with retention of sufficient iambic feet to steady and indeed check the measure from too cantering a pace<sup>1</sup>. Internal rhyme is carefully kept out of the blend, because that would introduce a second internal pause, but final rhyme is maintained. And the *sine qua non* of the thing is that, whether there are two short syllables or one short syllable in the third foot of the first half—whether it is anapaest or iamb—the trochaic effect of the final two syllables of that half before the pause shall be unalterable and strongly marked. Very often there is an actual grammatical stop of punctuation, nearly always there is something that would almost justify at least a break, even in such sentences as

Hast thou kept me here from the *not and* || the death that tame  
things die? (Bk II p 131)

where it may be observed that the second half will stand by itself—it has, as it were, discarded the borrowed thing "and", as well as that the less easily this can be done, as in the very next line—

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final *e*, than one of the lines quoted (and, by the way, misdivided in printing) from Robert of Gloucester at vol. I p. 68

That an hun|dred thou|sand en|dlen || and mo | icholle | him tende

But Robert cannot *hold* the measure, and his feminine endings spoil it even here. At the other end of the story it appears, as has been pointed out, in *Mauld*, but faintly and fitfully

<sup>1</sup> In other words the stages are—

(a) *Ti tum, ti-tum, ti tum, ti tum || ti-tum, ti tum ti-tee*

(b) *Ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum-ti*

*Ti-tum, ti-tum ti-tee*

(c) *Ti [ti ]tum, ti-[ti-]tum, 'x [ti-]tum ti || ti-[ti ]'um, [ti ]ti-tum, ['x ]ti-tee*

Hast thou feared me *overmuch*, *thou* foe of the gods on high?

so much the less good than usual is the effect

But, on the whole,

The *metring* of it is a joy to see

Perhaps the most beautiful and successful example is, not in *Sigurd* itself (though there are many there), but the exquisite lament of the "Wood Sun," in *The House of the Wolfings*, for the loss of her maiden divinity and the fate of her human lover—a thing that any poet in any metre will have to look over his store carefully before he vies with<sup>1</sup> And it carries the actual *Sigurd* through admirably, being good for narrative and good for poetry, possessing a combination of volume, currency, and effective rhythm-marking rare among metres, and having divers little accidental or minor conveniences, such as the way in which it lends itself to sententious half-refrains like

Sinfioth Signy's son

or

Sinfioth Sigmund's son

It should be needless to say how interesting is the comparison of this with the closely allied but quite different metre of "The Revenge" and "Lucknow," and how curious it is

<sup>1</sup> London, 1889, p. 103

Thou sayest it, I am outcast || for a God that lacketh mirth  
Hath no more place in God home || and never a place on earth  
A man grieves, and he gladdens, || or he dies and his grief is gone,  
But what of the grief of the Gods? and || the sorrow never undone?  
Yea, verily, I am the outcast || When first in thine arms I lay  
On the blossoms of the woodbine || my godhead passed away,  
Thenceforth unto thee was I looking || for the light and the glory of life,  
And the Gods' door shut behind me || till the day of the uttermost strife  
And now thou hast taken my soul, thou || wilt cast it into the night,  
And cover thine head with the darkness || and turn thine eyes from the light  
Thou would'st go to the empty country || where never a seed is sown  
And never a deed is fashioned || and the place where each is alone,  
But I thy thrall shall follow, || I shall come where thou seem'st to lie,  
I shall sit on the howe that hides thee, || and thou so dear and nigh!  
A few bones white in their war gear, || that have no help or thought,  
Shall be Thiodolf the Mighty, || so nigh, so dear—and nought!

"Mon Dieu, que cela est beau!" as Colymba says, not merely in rhythm and phrase, but in composition and completeness! And note how the peculiar "over run" of the pause at "Gods? and," "soul, thou," corresponds to the sob-break of the thought

to see what a change catalexis at the pause produces, or to point out many other agreeable things about it. How far it would do for general use I am not prepared to say. But in *Sigurd* it passes the test—that the poem becomes practically unthinkable in any other form than its own.

*Poems by the  
Way*

The fragments of verse in the later prose romances, which are numerous and often charming, cannot, sorry as I am for it, receive further notice here than that which has been given to the most beautiful of all above. But the more charming volume<sup>1</sup> in which, if his godhead had passed away as a pure writer of the divine harmony, he showed that he had lost nothing of it in power but resigned it of will, cannot be omitted. A more beautiful and defter wielding of the trochaic seven with casual iambic completion it will be almost impossible to find even in the seventeenth century, or even in Blake and Keats, than "Meeting in Winter." And it is curious that Morris has succeeded in charging it with a rapturousness for which Shakespeare and Milton had no use, because their employment of it is usually either light or stately, but which it is odder that Keats did not, of his very nature, develop. Blake alone comes near to it, but even he has not got just the touch of the last eight lines,<sup>2</sup> where the contrast of the apparent shortness, and the long-drawn-out lusciousness, of the line reminds one of Shakespeare's own contrast of number and time in the *Venus*.

He never did better ballad metre than "The Hall and the Wood"—few modern poets have ever done it so well—and in several poems he has that peculiarly soft and soothing form of the decasyllabic quatrain, or rather triplet with an odd line, which may be a refrain or half-refrain,

<sup>1</sup> *Poems by the Way* (London, 1891)

<sup>2</sup> O my love, how sweet and sweet  
That first kissing of thy feet,  
When the fire is sunk away,  
And the hall, made empty now,  
Groweth solemn, dim and vast!  
O my love, the night shall last  
Longer than men tell thereof,  
Laden with our lonely love!

added to its body<sup>1</sup> And the more familiar anapæstic dimeter alternately redundant and closed—a measure which may go from the merest tinkle to the most magical carolling—sweeps and sinks perfectly in “The Message of the March Wind”<sup>2</sup> The very curious arrangement, in triplets and quatrains, of “The Two Sides of the River” exhibits, successfully, his incessant “curiosity,” in the good Johnsonian sense, as respects prosodic arrangement<sup>3</sup>

I hope I have shown that, besides its extreme beauty intrinsically, the prosody of William Morris has a quite peculiar historical interest I think the reproach of “Wardour Street imitation” and “faking,” which has sometimes been brought against his work, unjust and mistaken in nearly all respects, but it is nowhere more so than

<sup>1</sup> Whence comest thou, and whither goest thou?  
Abide! abide! longer the shadows grow,  
Whatapest thou the dark to thee will show  
Abide! abide! for we are happy here

There is also a very lovely octosyllabic arrangement of somewhat the same kind in “Love’s Gleaning Tide”

Draw not away thy hands, my love  
With wind alone the branches move,  
And though the leaves be scant above—  
The Autumn shall not shame us

<sup>2</sup> This land we have loved in our love and our leisure  
For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach,  
The wide hills o’er the sea plain for them have no pleasure,  
The grey homes of their fathers no story to teach

The measure is “Moonish,” and he sometimes takes the Moorish liberty of foisting in a syllable, as in—

Like the love that o’ertook us un[a]wares and uncherished

But it is pitiful of slur

<sup>3</sup> Nor do I find—and this is the strongest test of it, and therefore not irrelevant or impertinent to mention—his skill in the least affected by what seems to me the rubbish, and, what is more, the mischievous rubbish, of the meaning of his political poems here What does meaning matter when you have, for instance, such verse as “A Death Song”? It must be a singularly feeble intellect and taste that cannot perform the easy dichotomy of metre and meaning, though no doubt it is one of the advantages of the study of prosody that it helps the process You pour the poison or the ditch water out, you keep, and marvel at, the golden cup You can refill it, as far as meaning goes, at your pleasure with the greatest things—the historic death of Sir Ralph Percy, “keeping the bird in his bosom”, the historic burial of Sir Christopher Mings, with the nameless twelve seamen, asking only for a fire ship, and the enemy, and a chance of vengeance for their captain But you cannot make the cup, unless you are a different person from the present writer, or (with all reverence) probably most of his readers

here True, Morris wrote with Chaucer or Gower and the fifteenth-century ballad- and carol-writers before him, certainly, with Browne and Wither almost certainly, with Keats again to a certainty. But the result of his study is not an artificial and literary following, it is a lineal representation, embodying the full real qualities of Victorian verse as well as the others. He serves himself heir to them all, there is the very strain of the lament of Troilus over the palace now no more of love, and of the Medea passage, and of "Alresford Pool," and of the "Eve of St Mark," as true in his verse as the blood of the great dead members of a great race is in the veins of their worthy descendants. Yet, as in those descendants, it is charged with the influence of new time. Without them he could not be, but the impossibility puts no stain of inferiority on him. It is, on the contrary, the warrant of his prosodic nobility, the sign and symbol of his legitimate rank. There is hardly a poet in all our great assembly who displays, in the procession of his verse, more of the *images* of the history of English poetry.<sup>1</sup>

It was, for the public at least, with blank verse, in *The Queen Mother and Rosamond* (1860), that Mr Swinburne<sup>2</sup> began, but though his blank verse has always been of fine

Mr Swinburne his blank verse postponed—*Atalanta in Calydon*

<sup>1</sup> Since this notice of Morris was written, Mr Bridges (*Selected Poems of R. B. Dixon*, London, 1909) has informed us that Morris's "first-born poem still exists, but will never be published," that it is "absurdly incompetent," that it "proves that Morris had never attempted poetry before, and that between this venture and his first book [*including the Oxford magazine-pieces or not?*—G S.] he must have studied and practised hard to some purpose." All the better, though, of course, one reserves actual judgment on the piece till it is before one. *Poeta nascitur* is true no doubt, but, as Du Bellay wisely said long ago, *poeta non fit* is in a sense false. *Poeta discit, crescit, melior fit*, unless he is either a second-class poet or a precocious and passing poet.

<sup>2</sup> The text was written before Mr Swinburne's death, and when there was no reason to anticipate its speedy occurrence. I have only performed the doubtful offices of altering tense and phrase, though as little as possible. But I hope I may be excused for preserving in this note, unaltered, the words with which it originally opened. "And now we come to the exception of this volume and this history—the one living master of English prosody, whom it would be impossible to leave out, and in reference to whom, fortunately, the usual difficulty of dealing with living writers in such a book as this does not present itself. There is neither difficulty nor invidiousness in selection, for fifty 'kind calm years' have put Mr Swinburne indisputably at the head of the choir of the poets of our days, and there is no need of *respect humain*—of glossing, or softening, or allowance—in dealing with his prosodic performances."

quality, and more penetrated with direct study of the Elizabethans than perhaps that of any one else, it is certainly not by it that he will chiefly live as a prosodist magician, and special notice of it may be postponed. It showed great improvement in *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), but for quality and individuality it could not compare with the marvellous choruses of that epoch-making book. Those who read *Atalanta* when it came out had no lack of "aged" horses of the very first class to try it by. They had just been reading Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*, with "The Voyage" and "In the Valley of Cauterets" to show them that the master's wing had moulted never a feather, and Browning's *Dramatis Personæ*, with things in it equally worthy of the author of "The Last Ride," and "In a Gondola," and "Love among the Ruins." But in the *Atalanta* choruses there was nothing in the least imitative of either of these poets, and there was a quality which Tennyson had seldom displayed, and which Browning, though he showed it sometimes, did not often employ in his best lyrics—the quality of speed. Further, this speed was the speed not merely of the runner but of the dancer, a motion miraculously combining the undulation and gyration, which usually require somewhat slow progression, with the utmost rapidity, yet never making slip or slur. "When the hounds of Spring are on Winter's traces" made an actual *renouveau* of English prosody, and sent a fresh pack of verse-hounds, bounding and doubling, and though not "slow in pursuit," "matched in mouth like bells," through wood and over field of the poetic country. And these hounds are true-bred. Every weapon and every sleight of the English poet—equivalence and substitution, alternation and repetition, rhymes and rhymeless suspension of sound, volley and check of verse, stanza construction, line- and pause-moulding, foot-conjunction and contrast,—this poet knows and can use them all. The triple rhyme itself, that springe for the unwary, gives him no difficulty. He seems to revel in variety; the stanzas actually hide, though they never falsify, their heredity of norm.



But is this variety merely a clever disguise of inability to preserve and support a severer form? Not in the least. The great—it is not rash to call it the immortal—

Before the beginning of years

comes at once to show the fact. Except in lengthening the compass of the stanzas by making them respectively multiples of the quatrain in batches of three, four, and five, there is nothing but the simplest equivalence to vary that quatrain itself—we might almost, but for the alternate rhyme, say the couplet. And yet there is no monotony of any kind,<sup>1</sup> and the piece bounds and sweeps to its end as inevitably in sound as in sense.

The third chorus—

For an evil blossom was born,

which would have been “a wonder and a world’s desire,” had it appeared alone, is not perhaps quite the equal of the first two, though the strophe beginning—

Was there not evil enough,

is equal to anything in them. I doubt whether regular postponement of rhymes in sets is very good in English (“born, blood, fruit, tears, scorn, bud, root, years,” etc.) But the graver and mostly iambic

Who hath given man speech? or who hath set therein

shows again wonderful *composition*—is a “greater Ode” of the best and most serious kind, while the lighter trochees of

O that I now, I too were

supply a charming contrast, to be magisterially completed by

Not as with sundering of the earth,

with its short lines shooting out into long. Nor must we

<sup>1</sup> It is very interesting to find a critic like Dr Brandes complaining of “stiffness,” “sameness,” of too “classical” effect, etc. (Cf. the German critic noticed above, p. 176.) The fact is that there is a sort of loose *sloppiness* in the German or Germanised ear, which cannot understand elasticity combined with form. Hence, probably, their rough and tumble “stress” systems of prosody. For the utter inadequacy of such a criticism on Swinburne, see the remarks below—especially those on “At a Month’s End.”

omit the considerable lyric interchange in the penultimate scene, and the admirable valediction of the chorus<sup>1</sup>

Now it was impossible that this achievement should not delight every catholic lover of English poetry, but I doubt very much whether many, even of such, fully realised its significance at the time when it appeared. It could not have come without the man, but it also could not have come without the hour. That hour was the result of two generations—as nearly as possible two of the technical “generations” of thirty years each. In the first of these the great Romantic revolters—often (almost always perhaps, save in the cases of Southey, Coleridge partly, and Keats especially) without much deliberate purpose of the prosodic kind—burst the bonds of the eighteenth century, and went, partly on, partly back, to freedom. In the second this freedom was expanded and varied by the *epigoni*, whose leaders were Tennyson and Browning. And it is scarcely less remarkable that Mr Swinburne, in addition to his indispensable and unanalysable personal gift, brought to the matter a very largely increased learning as well as a specially qualified power. His familiarity with Elizabethan literature is matter of common knowledge, but I believe I am right in saying that there was little in the whole range of English poetry, since Chaucer at any rate, that he did not know. His classical scholarship was undoubted and it was accompanied by acquaintance with the whole range of French<sup>2</sup> literature at least, among modern and mediæval tongues. Thus he possessed, as hardly anybody since Gray had possessed, the three arms—the horse, foot, and artillery—of classical, English, and foreign (not merely modern) verse and letters generally.

<sup>1</sup> Selection from Mr Swinburne is equally tempting and difficult, from the impossibly large number of specimens that suggest themselves. I must therefore refer to the originals except in specially illustrative cases.

<sup>2</sup> To what exact extent Provençal was included in this I am not sure. I think his adaptation (with acknowledgment) of the great *alba* refrain for “In the Orchard” has deceived some people. He very likely knew Bartsch, but as for the short metres which have been alleged, he could have got them from Drayton and others—if he wanted to get them from anything but his own genius and the spirit of English poetry.

*Chastelard*

These gifts, and the personal one not least, were, if not better, yet certainly no worse shown in *Chastelard* (1866). I think, if I were a pedant, I could be pedant enough to point out one or two specks<sup>1</sup> in the beautiful French verses which open the play, but they are the merest specks, and the whole is of the best brand of *mil-huit-cent-trente*—with something added that, at the time of Mr. Swinburne's writing, even Verlaine in his earliest work had not developed in French. But this is extraneous, though by no means irrelevant. The English blank verse shows, I think, a further advance. I shall not say that Chastelard's final speech wholly escapes that touch, of character less dramatic than poetic, which I have hinted against all our later verse of this kind. But it comes nearer the escape, there is hardly more than one bar of the window left unbroken. And the *φύμη* of the Preacher at the end of Act v. Sc. 1—

The mercy of a harlot is a sword,  
And her mouth sharper than a flame of fire,

has the quality which none but the greatest verse possesses. You hear it, and it abides with you for ever.

But the lyrics are, as usual, the test and symbol of the prosodic matter, and if anybody wants something finer than

Between the sunset and the sea,

let him seek noon at fourteen o'clock, and when he has found it, sit down and eat better bread than is made of wheat. The manipulation of Sameness and Difference is the secret of prosody as of much else, and it is perfect here.

*Poems and  
Ballads*

From such a lyrist one could not but crave *toute la lyre*, and it came. In *Poems and Ballads* (1866) there is hardly anything that would not repay prosodic study, for, even in pieces identically metred, the poet's quenchless individuality of handling measure, and his less varied but wonderfully adaptable command of diction, differentiate them. But of course we must group and select here. The

<sup>1</sup> Only specks compared to the blot indicated above in Morris, and common in all but the best English-French verse

*canzone*-type of the opening "ballads" of Life and Death connects itself pretty obviously with the chorus measures of *Atalanta*, but the metre of *Laus Veneris*—so great *Laus Veneris* a poem that perhaps it was unjustly deprived of title pre-eminence for the whole volume—shows new powers. It owed, of course, and never ignored, royalty of direct suggestion<sup>1</sup> to FitzGerald (*v sup* p 273), but the difference of handling and result is almost startling. I have given myself, and perhaps my readers, some pains, and myself at any rate some pleasure, by tracing and studying the biology and the qualities of the decasyllabic quatrain<sup>2</sup>. We have seen how, "simple of itself," it has a dangerous tendency to monotony, and how poet after poet, since poets were taken out of the go-cart, has tried this and that device of clipping, shaping, varying rhyme-order, and the like. Mr Swinburne, following FitzGerald, has taken the principle of the *terza*, that of the single line unrhymed in the individual stanza, but though, again like his fore-runner, he has not attempted to make this the rhyme-staple of the next stanza, his third lines, unlike those of *Omar*, rhyme in pairs. By this means not merely is the above referred to monotony of the individual stanza relieved, but each alternate stanza holds out a feeler to the next, making the arrangement almost an octave—a squadron charging in two troops. The poet has been wisely chary of enjambment between the quatrains, though using it when he wants it, while he has alternated enjambment and single-moulding, as regards contiguous lines in the stanza, with as careful a hand. The poem is by no means a short one, extending to more than four hundred lines, and the situation has no emotional change, but the thoroughly sustained heavy atmosphere of doom never becomes oppressive, though it remains always grand, until it finishes with the representative magnificence of the conclusion—

<sup>1</sup> The interesting story of its composition, told by "G. M." in *The Times* just after Mr Swinburne's death and before his own, embodied the fact dramatically.

<sup>2</sup> See under Davies, Davenant, Dryden, Gray, Hood, Fennyson, and others, as well as FitzGerald,

I seal myself upon thee with my might,  
 Abiding always out of all men's sight,  
 Until God loosen over sea and land  
 The thunder of the trumpets of the night—

one of the greatest quatrains in English, leading up to one of the greatest lines

Few things are prosodically more interesting than to observe the different effects, notwithstanding the close relationship, of these "outrigger"-quatrains in *Omar* and the *Laus* respectively.<sup>1</sup> Both have the general effect of meditation, which this form, manipulate it as you will, rarely relinquishes, and never successfully. But Fitzgerald's variety adapts itself naturally to, or rises naturally out of (I do not in the least care which phrase is preferred), the discursive, satirical, very largely intellectual character of the subject, while Swinburne's is as body to soul with the intense passion and the concentrated brooding of his situation. "For soul is form and doth the body make," and the amiable enthusiasts who will maintain that there is no such thing as body, leave *us* the enjoyment of both, and so enable us to make the best of both the worlds of Congreve's epigram

Various forms

I have always thought the stanza of the "Triumph of Time"—which takes a somewhat quicker movement, after he had so well shown in the *Laus* what master he was of the slow one—a wonderful triumph in itself,<sup>2</sup> but I do not

<sup>1</sup> To read these two poems one after the other is a curious and never-palling luxury

<sup>2</sup> It is hard to say whether the poem is lovelier with redundancy or without, so I shall give a specimen of both

You have chosen and clung to the chance they sent you,  
 Life sweet as perfume, and pure as prayer,  
 But will it not one day in heaven repent you?  
 Will they solace you wholly, the days that were?  
 Will you lift up your eyes between sadness and bliss,  
 Meet mine and see where the great love is,  
 And tremble and turn and be changed? Content you,  
 The gate is shut, I shall not be there.

There lived a singer in France of old,  
 By the tideless, dolorous, midland sea  
 In a land of sand, and ruin, and gold  
 There shone one woman, and none but she

know that it is more beautiful than that of "Itylus"<sup>1</sup> with its secular association, or indeed than the less uncommon, but admirably managed, anapæstic quatrains of "Les Noyades"<sup>2</sup> Although "Anactoria" is a fine poem, I cannot be unreservedly enthusiastic over Mr Swinburne's heroics (with due exception for *Tristram*, to be developed later) The stopped form is not quite in his way, and the enjambed encourages, rather too much, his tendency to be *Isæo torrentior* Many, very many, single couplets rise up and smite me in the face for this utterance, as—

Take thy limbs living, and new mould with these  
A lyre of many faultless agonies,

wherein one may discover capabilities of a new Drydenian model, very admirable But on the whole I have written, and I turn with ineffable relief to the "Hymn to Proserpine," and to that magnificent couplet, so descriptive of the metre in which it is clothed—

Fate is a sea without shore, and the soul is a rock that abides,  
But her ears are vexed with the roar, and her face with the foam of  
the tides

Except that this roar vexes not, and this foam only caresses

But perhaps you do not like galloping metres You are wrong but the poet is ready for you The very goddess who has just been celebrated waits in her

And finding life for her love's sake full,  
Being fain to see her, he bade set sul,  
Touched hand, and saw her as life grew cold,  
And praised God, seeing, and so died he

<sup>1</sup> Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow,  
How can thine heart be full of the spring?  
A thousand summers are over and dead  
What hast thou found in the spring to follow?  
What hast thou found in thy heart to sing?  
What wilt thou do when the summer is shed?

<sup>2</sup> Whatever a man of the sons of men  
Shall say in his heart of the Gods above,  
They have shown man verily, once and again,  
Marvellous mercy and infinite love

"Garden"<sup>1</sup> to scatter her poppy, as she does in "Illicet"<sup>2</sup> with an even dreamier motion, yet with an equal melody

The variety and the individuality of the construction of these measures becomes almost bewildering, though every one of them responds, with utmost accuracy, to the laws and specifications which have been reached, as the result of actual examination, in these three volumes. Every effect has its cause in devices slowly but surely and legitimately developed from Godric to Tennyson, and the multiplicity of the effects themselves is evidence—not that the causes have reached their ultimate power, but that that power is very nearly infinite. The cunningly shaped quintet (utilising that special rhyme-arrangement *abaaab* which the quintet invites) and the peculiar stroke of the shortened final line to be found in "Fragoletta"<sup>3</sup> and repeated in "Félice"<sup>4</sup> with the other order *ababb*, the two beautiful rondels with shortened refrain, the

<sup>1</sup> Pale beyond porch and portal,  
Crowned with calm leaves she stands,  
Who gathers all things mortal  
With cold immortal hands  
Her languid lips are sweeter  
Than love's who fears to greet her,  
To men that mix and meet her  
From many times and lands

<sup>2</sup> There is an end of joy and sorrow,  
Peace all day long, all night, all morrow,  
But never a time to laugh or weep  
The end is come of pleasant places,  
The end of tender words and faces,  
The end of all, the popped sleep

How good it is to compare this with the original romance six or *seven couplets*, and see the difference made by the double endings of the couplets and the additional foot in the third and sixth lines

<sup>3</sup> O bitterness of things too sweet I  
O broken singing of the dove I  
Love's wings are over fleet,  
And like the panther's feet  
The feet of love I

<sup>4</sup> What shall be said between us here,  
Among the downs, between the trees,  
In fields that knew our feet last year,  
In sight of quiet sands and seas,  
This year, Félice?

solemn ode-measures of the "Litany" and the "Lamentation", the *carillon* tunes of "Anima Anceps"<sup>1</sup> and "A Match",<sup>2</sup> the wonderful ring-beat of "Faustine", and the throbbing insistence of "Rococo,"<sup>3</sup> with the catches varied in the body of the line, but shot with "remember" and "forget" in a way a little reminding one of the *Pearl* refrains—to all these, and to each of them, endless study and endless admiration are due. But the poet wants no tricks and frounces of mere variation in his metre. Take "Stage Love"<sup>4</sup> with its rigid economy of means—a plain trochaic trimeter catalectic. Never a foot varied, never a licence taken, the only means of variety adopted a simple, and that not wide, displacement or suspension of pause, and the arrangement of alternate couplets of double and single rhyme. Yet you will hardly find a completer thing, a more finished symphony, in English poetry.

I must pass many, only glancing at the beautiful outline (7, 4 7, 4, 6, 6, 10, *ababccb*) of the form of

<sup>1</sup> Till death have broken  
Sweet life's love-token,  
Till all be spoken  
That shall be said—  
What dost thou praying,  
O soul? and playing  
With song, and saying  
Things flown and fled?

For this we know not,  
That fresh springs flow not,  
And fresh griefs grow not,  
When men are dead—  
When strange years cover  
Lover and lover,  
And joys are over  
And tears are shed

<sup>2</sup> If love were what the rose is  
And I were like the leaf,  
Our lives would grow together  
In sad or singing weather,  
Blown fields or flowerful closes,  
Green pleasure or grey grief  
If love were what the rose is  
And I were like the leaf

<sup>3</sup> Take hands and part with laughter,  
Touch lips and part with tears,  
Once more and no more after,  
Whatever comes with years,  
We twain shall not remeasure  
The ways that left us twain,  
Nor crush the lees of pleasure  
From sanguine grapes of pain

<sup>4</sup> When the game began between them for a jest,  
He played king and she played queen to match the best  
Laughter soft as tears, and tears that turned to laughter,  
These were things she sought for years and sorrowed after—

where the heavy, mournful, scornful stamp of the trochee (shadowed even in "Boadicea," imperfectly anticipated in some things of Mrs. Browning's, and perfectly achieved, but differently measured out, in the "Vision of Sin") is superlative. There are "twenty-four" things (as Gumbo says) that I long to quote. But "Faustine" itself is universally known, and there is no room for the others. Only let the reader meditate on this miniature anthology of forms—a small minority of those in the book.



'Before the Mirror', the hammer-strokes, cunningly varied but closely connected in rhythm, of the "Songs in time of Order and of Revolution," and the stately stanza (with a rich rhetoric in it suitable to the subject) of the "Victor Hugo" lines, the soft dream-echoes of "Before Dawn," arranged (as is "Madonna Mia," though in shorter lines) in Mr Swinburne's favourite rhyme-scheme *aabcbcb*, the "Hesperia" variation of the long rhymed anapæstic with alternate masculine and feminine rhyme, the strangely effective octosyllabic couplets, stamped separate in their very moulding, of "After Death" The Sapphics and hendecasyllabics will come best in the chapter of the Hexameter, where also the relation thereto of "Hesperia" itself may be touched But something more must be said—on the principle of to him that hath shall be given—on the most striking prosodie triumph of the book, the already twice or thrice mentioned new Praed-stanza of "Dolores" and the "Dedication"

The  
"Dolores"  
metre

It may be permitted, I think, to a historian of prosody, to regard this delightful thing with rather special delectation, for there are few things in the whole subject which show better that that subject is no vanity, and that it can only be a vexation of spirit if it is improperly handled The initial "runtity-tumtity-tum" of Shenstone and Cowper, the comic improvements of Gay and others, the apparently casual inspiration which made Byron get rid of the jolt and jingle by the simple experiment of alternative double rhyme, in Hardée's "Garden of Roses", the perfecting of this form by Praed—these surely form a genealogical tree of sufficient interest as they stand But though it may be true that "seldom comes a better," yet it does come sometimes, and so Mr Swinburne thought of shortening the final line I shall not say that this is unbetterable, I set no limits to the powers of the Muse But I cannot help thinking that, though they may equal, they can hardly exceed it in its special kind

The prosodie effect of this slight shortening of the last line may at first sight seem astonishing, but those

who have been good enough to follow the demonstrations of this History will be quite prepared for it. It is exactly on a par with Tennyson's manipulation of the decasyllabic quatrain in the "Palace" and the "Dream", it is directly related to the effect of the Alexandrine in the Spenserian, though that be lengthening and this be shortening, and it is not so very far removed from that of the final couplet in rhyme-royal and some other things. A succession of stanzas, not only uniform with each other, but uniformly arranged within themselves, is always liable to two bad effects—monotony and disconnection—which may be removed by constant legerdemain on the part of the poet, but hardly. The isolation or individualising of the final line at once breaks the monotony, and, strange as it may seem, establishes connection. It reminds you that you are at the end of one stanza, and it prepares you for the beginning of another.

But the special modification has also its special effect. It gives the "fall" which is so invaluable, and it permits the qualification of that fall as either "dying" or giving a "flourish" effect in the good sense. The former is the turn given to it (suitably to the matter, but not by any means wholly *through* the matter) in the "Dedication," where the final stanza "sinks on the sea" with the folding wing-sweep of an albatross. The closing motion, combined of "flourish" and fall, is shown throughout "Dolores," and makes the stanza almost ideally suitable for the great series of pictures and situations that the poem contains. Nor could anything contrast more finely with the melancholy music and the sweeping rush of the companion pieces already noticed—"The Garden of Proserpine" and "Hesperia."

To what extent and in what proportion I ought to discuss the contents of the long row of volumes—most of them denizens of my shelves from their earliest appearance—which have followed the first *Poems and Ballads*, I cannot be certain. Pleasure at the helm steers me towards the whole unflinchingly, but the stern daughter of the Voice of God on the bridge speaks in a manner

Other books  
*A Song of  
 Italy and  
 Songs before  
 Sunrise*

The second  
Poems and  
Ballads

justifying the late Professor Bain's unfavourable remarks on her lack of "engaging" qualities<sup>1</sup> The sustainment of the apparently simple metre<sup>2</sup> of *A Song of Italy* (1867) would of itself, without other evidence, serve as proof for the Orders of the King in matters prosodic *Songs before Sunrise* (1871) would require nearly as much room as the *Poems and Ballads* themselves, if that were not the elder brother, and the wonderful majesty of the dizains of the "Prelude" sets a standard which the poet never fails to keep through a score of variations, till, with a characteristic maintenance of power in slight change, he ends with the *neuvains* of the "Epilogue"<sup>3</sup>

Many things here might be—perhaps ought to be—particularised, there are some in the second *Poems and Ballads* (1878) which must be In the *Songs before Sunrise* (consequent upon the obsession and oppression of the "Terrible Year") there was a certain *tension*, prosodic-

<sup>1</sup> "A 'Daughter' is an engaging object in the ordinary acceptation, but 'stern' detracts from the tender aspect" (*Rhetoric and Composition*, II 113, 114)

<sup>2</sup> Upon a windy night of stars that fell  
At the wind's spoken spell, etc

I hardly know any one else who could have kept this recurrent wave-like motion, with so little monotony, for sixty pages

<sup>3</sup> Here are the corresponding conclusions, with Mr Swinburne's favourite end-note of "sea"

#### Prelude

A little time that we may fill  
Or with such good works or such ill  
As loose the bonds, or make them strong,  
Wherein all mankind suffer wrong  
By rose hung river and light foot till  
There are who rest not, who think long  
Till they discern, as from a lull,  
At the sun's hour of morning song,  
Known of souls only, and those souls free,  
The sacred spaces of the sea

#### Epilogue

Yea, if no morning must behold  
Man, other than were they now cold,  
And other deeds than past deeds done,  
Nor any near or far off sun  
Salute him risen and sunlike-souled,  
Free, boundless, fearless, perfect, one—  
Let man's world die, like worlds of old,  
And here, in heaven's sight, only be  
The sole sun on the worldless sea

ally as otherwise the *détente* comes here, though with no lack of severity when it is required, as in "The Last Oracle" and "In the Bay" But "A Forsaken Garden" takes us back to an easier and lighter motion, with verse less at high pressure, with less struggle of steam against valve "Relics" continues this state of things, but "At a Month's End" once more gives us an effect unique and individual, the rush of the rapid measure balanced and rhythmized into something new and delightful

I have commented, in more places than one or two of this prosodic history, on instances of *karole*—of the continuous dancing measure that picks up the movement from stanza to stanza in a sort of endless chain, and maintains this movement, of dance not of pace, throughout This poem seems to me to have attained the furthest point yet secured in this particular department The magic of exact but elastic equivalence has reached almost its highest stretch in it Schematically it is nothing more than "long measure" with the odd lines double-rhymed hypercatalectically But, by working on the fact that this additional syllable gives a trochaic "throw-back" throughout the line, and by marvellous management of the occasional substitution of anapæsts, the poet actually keeps the three balls of iambic, trochaic, and anapæstic rhythm in the air all at the same time Insist merely on the "four-stress" character, rein up the iambs into unbroken sequence as such, slur the anapæsts into iambs themselves, miss the under-suggestion of trochaic rhythm, and the whole beauty of the thing has vanished Allow the fountain of song, within its limited-unlimited powers, to rise in liquid mazes, let iamb, trochee, anapæst, perform their wondrous *chassé-croisé* as it is their nature to do, and you get a choreographic and harmonic effect absolutely unparalleled—a "musical ride by torch-light" worthy of "The Prophet and the Bride"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A poem like this is the best text for refuting such opinions as those of Dr Brandes and the German critic above noticed Very hot ice, wondrous strange snow, are the "sameness" and "stiffness" of such stanzas as these

The night last night was strange and shaken,  
More strange the change of you and me

The later  
volumes

I have lists of dozens—it would be no exaggeration to say scores—of other poems in this and the remaining volumes on which it would be worth while, if it were possible, to comment. In fact almost any one of these poems up to the latest—still more, any two or three—might be employed, almost as well as those which have been already selected from the earlier collections, to illustrate the marvellous use made by Mr Swinburne of the means with which English poets were by this time provided. “A Wasted Vigil,” “Pastiche” very specially, the “Choriambics,” the “Memorial” poems, “A Vision of Spring in Winter,” “Ex Voto,” “At Parting,” in the volume just noticed, “On the Cliffs” or “The Garden of Cymodoec” in *Songs of the Springtides* (1880), the “Adieux à Marie Stuart” and the inexhaustible variations of “A Dark Month” in the miscellaneous additions to *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882), the extraordinarily varied applications of the “Roundel” principle in the *Century* of that same (1883), “Neap-tide” or “The Interpreters” in the third *Poems and Ballads* (1889), plenty of other things down to the *Channel Passage* volume (1904) and later these are selections of selections of selections—all showing the triumph of the foot-system with equivalence and substitution, the lucky-bag of fresh-minted form wherein the poet (*if he can*) may dip and take for ever and for ever. But

---

Once more, for the old love's sake forsaken,  
We went down once more toward the sea

As a star feels the sun and falters,  
Touched to death by diviner eyes—  
As on the old gods' untended altars  
The old fire of withered worship dies

For a new soul let whose please pray,  
We are what life made us, and shall be  
For you the jungle and me the sea spray,  
And south for you and north for me

So to my soul in surer fashion,  
Your savage stamp and savour hangs  
The print and perfume of old passion,  
The wild beast mark of panther's fangs

perhaps we must be content with dwelling slightly on three points of some general interest blank verse, the heroic couplets of *Tristram of Lyonesse*, and the various extremely long combinations which the poet at different times adventured—before and after caricaturing them with equal humour and good-humour<sup>1</sup> in “Nephelidia”

The blank verse, in and out of the plays, needs the least notice. For anybody else it would be marvellously good, and it is in fact marvellously good in itself. But blank verse, more than any other kind except perhaps the sonnet, calls for compression, lays down the law of not-too-much. Now these were not precisely the process to which Mr Swinburne was most attentive, and the law to which he was most docile. He knew all the tricks and all the manners, and he certainly did not abuse them more than Browning did. But his swashing-blow is not here, or, to speak less boisterously, he does not here open the choicest volumes of his book of magic. We want rhyme for colour, and we want the myriad forms of lyric contour for shape.

To the somewhat similar but less decided doubt hinted already about his couplet, the opening of *Tristram of Lyonesse* may, of course, be objected. That astonishing overture<sup>2</sup>—which, for nearly fifty lines at a breath, as it were, and with few breathing spaces through its nearly three hundred, transforms the decasyllabic pairs into one billowing volume of lyrical outrush,—can in one sense be itself objected to only by a person who is half fool and half churl, who cannot take the goods the Gods provide, and will not do aught but blaspheme the giver for the provi-

<sup>1</sup> One, of course, cites the *Heptalogia* (1880) with the little bow of excuse proper in the case of a book published anonymously, even though afterwards acknowledged. But there is hardly any other volume more decisive as to its author's prosodic skill. It is a pity that in one piece the “good-humour” failed. “Alas! they had been friends in youth.”

<sup>2</sup> Love that is first and last of all things made,  
The light that has the living world for shade,  
The spirit that for temporal veil has on  
The souls of all men, woven in unison,  
One fiery raiment with all lives inwrought  
And lights of sunny and starry deed and thought

But the quoting of verse like that is as the letting out of waters.

sion. But if you take the poem as a whole—and, after all, a “long poem” *does* hold itself out to be taken as a whole—I do not think the measure justifies itself fully. I do not think it justifies itself nearly as well as the couplet of Morris. Perhaps this was much more because the poet had not “the narrative head” than because he could not manage the metre, but the fact remains

The long  
metres

As for the “magnums”—tappit-hens, or Jeroboams rather—in which he sometimes chose to bottle his wine, they again are difficult to quarrel with, even as no rational person would quarrel with an actual tappit-hen of '78 Lafite, or an actual Jeroboam of Sandeman's special '70. Yet, not as exceptions, but “to live with”—for human nature's daily food,—ordinary bottles, with a modest magnum itself now and then, are perhaps more convenient. Moreover, these things have a peculiarity which does not appertain to the bounties of Bacchus in their larger receptacles. They have a wicked habit of “splitting themselves up” and saying, “You may write me how you like, but you cannot read me at full length.” They do this so obstinately—they are so thoroughly English in all their qualities—that even the poet's malice aforethought, in trying to make the split impossible by making it occur in the middle of a word, does not prevent them. English poetry is, after all, greater than any English poet, and English poetry, when it is asked to pass a line like

If again from the night or the twilight of ages Aristophanes had  
arisen

shly suggests to the reader the “U-niversity of Göttingen,” and a certain passage about Mile-End, and says, “My children, you are entitled to read this

“If again from the night or the twilight of a-  
ges Aristophanes had arisen”

Wherever you look—in the poem just quoted (the “Sunrise” finale of the *Tristram* volume), in the sixteeners of the choruses of *Erechtheus*,<sup>1</sup> in the anapaestic

<sup>1</sup> The unrhymed stanzas here will come best in the Hexameter chapter, as also will the ever-memorable “Evening on the Broads” form

tetrameters (eight feet and sometimes twenty-four full syllables) of the "March" opening to the third *Poems and Ballads*,<sup>1</sup> in the deliberately Aristophanic seven-foot lines of the *Birds* version in *Studies in Song*, in the sixteeners, sometimes hypercatalectic, of the sixth roundel "In Guernsey",<sup>2</sup> in the tetrameter hypercatalectic of "Nephe-lidia,"<sup>3</sup> which extends the twenty-four above mentioned to twenty-five or elsewhere, in the other seven-footers of "In the Water" (*A Midsummer Holiday*), and the internal rhymed unified triplets of "On the South Coast" and "A Threnody" in *Astrophel*—the virtual, if sometimes shifting, cleavage strikes my ear. I do not mind making a compromise, I do not "sin my mercies", if Mr Swinburne had fancied forty-eight syllables, I should take them and be thankful, the multiplication would not be vexation to me. But it would still seem to me unnecessary, and, except as an exception, rather undesirable.

Yet they showed, even as such, his extraordinary prosodic powers, for almost anybody else would have "clubbed" the manœuvres of such unwieldy bodies of syllables, before he had got through a dozen lines. And so they join with the others to establish a prosodic record, not exactly for the *invention* with which he has sometimes been credited, still less for any *innovation* on the general principles of English prosody, but for unsurpassed versatility and virtuosity in adapting, varying, managing the great materials and means with which he and his lesser fellows were now furnished, by the thought and the work of a score of generations of English poets, by the growth and development of seven centuries of English language and English literature.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That the sea was not lovelier than here was the land, nor the night than the day, nor the day than the night

<sup>2</sup> Night in utmost noon, forlorn and strong, with heart athirst and fasting

<sup>3</sup> Till the darkling desire of delight shall be far, as a fawn that is free from the fangs that pursue her

<sup>4</sup> I may perhaps add that nowhere is the cleavage tendency more apparent than (as is indeed inevitable) in the internally rhymed forms, as, for instance, in the beautiful and chivalrous threnody for Tennyson

Fairer far  
Than the morning star,



They have, moreover, the special interest for us of having elicited from him the very rare and specially precious vouchsafing of a directly prosodic note to the Aristophanic version above cited (*Studies in Song*, p 68) This contains one particular sentence, which shows that he knew, and knew consciously, more about preceptist prosody than nine out of ten, if not ninety-nine out of a hundred, of the pieceptists whom we have discussed and shall discuss in this book "His (Aristophanes') marvellous metrical invention of the anapæstic heptameter<sup>1</sup> is almost exactly reproducible in a *language to which all variations and combinations of anapæstic, iambic, or trochaic metre are as natural and pliable as all dactylic and spondaic forms of verse are unnatural and abhorrent*" The excommunication is indeed put with that hearty hyperbole which was Mr Swinburne's natural mode But it is only a hyperbole of the truth and the earlier benediction is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth Neglect it, and you will fumble in vain with English prosody, observe it, and you will be in no danger of poor Peter Bell's sad fate when he made experiments on Nature

MISS ROSSETTI  
*Goblin  
Market*

Cicero (the fact was doubtless well known to Miss Cornelia Blimber) used to exercise himself, almost to his latest days, with declamations, and it is known that Miss

---

And sweet for us as the songs that rang ||  
 Loud through Heaven  
 From the choral Seven  
 When all the stars of the morning sang, |||  
 Shines the song  
 That we loved so long  
 Since first such love in us flamed and sprang |||

which appeared originally as

Fairer far than the morning star, and sweet for us as the songs that rang, etc  
 He had already begun the arrangement in Section III of "The Armada" (*Poems and Ballads*, Third Series, 1889) A complete historical conspectus-syllabus of Mr Swinburne's prosody would take half this volume

<sup>1</sup> "Heptameter" is, of course, in strictness a slip, anapæsts being classically arranged in pairs for a "metre" "Tetrameter brachycatalectic" more correctly— but no matter

Christina Rossetti was fond of *bouts-rimés* and (if I mistake not) even of nonsense verses. The practice was certainly well justified of the practitioner. A more charming and certain-fingered executant in English verse it would be difficult to find, while she has little to fear from the reproach, sometimes cast upon the presence of "execution" in this and other arts, of obscuring or masking the absence of feeling. The Oxford blue of the back of *Goblin Market* may have weathered itself to a dingy slate in five-and-forty years, and the margin of her brother's quaint picturing of those most agreeable but treacherous persons who are selling Laura fruit at so dear a price, may have a certain foxiness. But the verse is as fresh as ever.

The metre of the title-poem may be best described as a dedoggerelised Skeltonic, with the gathered music of the various metrical progress since Spenser, utilised in the place of the wooden rattling of the followers of Chaucer. There may be discerned in it the same inclination towards line-irregularity which has broken out, at different times, in the Pindaric of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and in the rhymelessness of Sayers earlier and of Mr Arnold later. But Miss Rossetti was too wise to discard the aid of rhyme. The more the metre is studied<sup>1</sup> the more audacious may

The title poem

<sup>1</sup> An extract or two may help —

Morning and evening  
Maids heard the goblins cry  
"Come buy our orchard fruits,  
Come buy, come buy  
Apples and quinces,  
Lemons and oranges,  
Plump unpecked cherries,  
Melons and raspberries

She clipped a precious golden lock,  
She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,  
Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red  
Sweeter than honey from the rock,  
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,  
Clearer than water flowed that juice

its composition seem. It is, from one point of view, a mere *fatrasie* or *macédoine* of measures, not merely in length but in base—iambic, trochaic, dactylic, anapæstic—the grouse jostling each other like those on the famous moor, the air thick with metres as it was with majors round the equally famous damsel. The almost surprised contempt of the *Quarterly* on Keats, the interesting indignation of the *Blackwood* reviewer of Tennyson, would have been turned into something like speechless horror by this Bedlam of discord, as they would have thought it. As a matter of fact, though I daresay Miss Rossetti had never heard the words “equivalence” or “substitution” in their prosodic meaning, and though it is extremely unlikely that she ever consciously realised Shakespeare’s use of shortened and lengthened norms in, say, *Hamlet*, if she had set herself to give a demonstration of these things, as they appear in their very artfullest and yet most seeming-simple shape, she could hardly have succeeded better. Like so many other metres, this has for regulative pattern, with the cautions so often given, the rock-and-oak-born octosyllabic couplet—oak of English rhythm and rock of Romance metre. It appears, now and then, in sober completeness, as here

Beside the brook, along the glen,  
She heard the tramp of goblin men

But it comes oftener in single lines, or in associations of distichs not rhymed together. To this the *three-foot*

But ever in the noonlight  
She pined and pined away,  
Sought them by night and day,  
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey,  
Then fell with the first snow,  
While to this day no grass will grow  
Where she lies low  
I planted daisies there a year ago  
That never blow

Laughed every goblin  
When they spied her peeping  
Came towards her hobbling,  
Flying, running, leaping,  
Puffing and blowing

line is the natural companion and complement, as in "common measure" But Miss Rossetti thinks of another thing in connection with that. Use a monosyllabic foot as first or third, or both, and you will get thiec feet on the general scheme for schematic purposes, but, at the same time, a quasi-dactylic effect, similar to that (which may possibly have been in her mind) of Kingsley's "Frcya" poem<sup>1</sup>

Applying these principles, under the guidance of the all-allowing or forbidding ear, you get various forms, varied still further by "telescope" licence in shortening to monometer<sup>2</sup> and in extension to full decasyllable<sup>3</sup>. And these variations are most skilfully grouped, so as to make what may be called quasi-stanzas or strophes, not interrupting the continuous flow of the verse, but giving subordinate effects like the whirls and eddies that form and dissolve again in a rapid. Of course there is something of the *tour de force* in an effect so complicated, and, easily as the actual exercise goes off, I do not know that one would recommend it for constant practice. But, as it stands, it is doubly, or even trebly, enjoyable as a mere feast to the ear, as a display of prosodic skill, and, historically, as an exemplification of the powers given by centuries of successful and unsuccessful endeavour, and of the way in which the most apparently lawless excursions can be reduced to law.

How little this eccentric success was evidence of that

<sup>1</sup> Cūr|rĩnts and gōose|berrĩcs,

or

Currants and gooseberries,

or, shorter still,

Citrons | and dates,

ΟΓ

Citrons and dates

Of course, in both cases, combined choriambic arrangement may please some ears better, but this, to me, is always reducible to simpler terms

<sup>2</sup> That never blow

Her fire away, etc

And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept.

(in recent times too common) weakness which can only be strong by eccentricity, you have but to turn a page or two to see. The exquisite regularity of "Dreamland"<sup>1</sup> is as patent as its exquisite suggestion, and the same qualities reappear in "Echo,"<sup>2</sup> as in the perfectly simple and perfectly succeeded "When I am dead, my Dearest." While between the two—permitting itself some so-called irregularities to suit the intensity of its subdued passion, but uniform in general scheme—comes that wonderful "Sleep at Sea,"<sup>3</sup> which ranks among the half-dozen greatest devotional poems in English, let the others be what they may.

His later  
books

In *The Prince's Progress* (1866) there is no falling off prosodically, but, almost naturally, there is less to notice as new. There is, however, greater real irregularity in "The Poor Ghost." This takes the musical slur-licence of some of those measures of Moore's which we noticed formerly, but applies it, of course, in a rather different manner, and carries it further. It is quite certain that if there are editors in the future like those of the present, who find no Alexandrines in Chaucer, and cut words out as "foolish glosses" in order to get rid of the inconvenient thing, they will cut the three first stanzas given below<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Where sunless rivers weep Their waves into the deep, She sleeps a charmed sleep Awake her not	Led by a single star, She came from very far, To seek, where shadows are, Her pleasant lot
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<sup>2</sup> Come to me in the silence of the night,  
 Come in the speaking silence of a dream,  
 Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright  
 As sunlight on a stream,  
 Come back in tears,  
 O memory, hope, love, of finished years.

<sup>3</sup> One by one slowly, Ah how sad and slow! Wailing and praying, The spirits rise and go	Clear stainless spirits, White, as white as snow, Pale spirits, wailing For an overthrow
--	---

<sup>4</sup> "Oh! when do you come, my dear friend, to me?  
 With your golden hair all fallen below your knee,  
 And your face as white as snowdrops on the lea,  
 And your voice as hollow as the hollow sea?"  
 "From the other world I come back to you,  
 My locks are uncured with dripping, drenching dew

about in like manner Of course she meant them as they are, and I only request the fit reader of the original to turn back to the poem before—as smooth as it is sweet—for comparison But in this book, even in the title-poem and more elsewhere, she experimented much in these directions

Still, I think she grew dissatisfied with them, for there is much less of them (always excepting the great "Ballad of Boding") in *A Pageant and other Poems* (1881), less still in the collected *Poems* of 1890 and the posthumous *New Poems* of 1896, as well as in the abundant verse scattered about the prose devotional books,<sup>1</sup> and never to be neglected by the lover of poetry, just as her incomparable collects and short prayers are never to be neglected by the lover of prose

Any one who *begins* his acquaintance with the definitive collection of 1904 would hardly notice much "irregularity" in her, it is so welhmed in various but perfectly regular music And the absolute command of this—a command which never failed, which was never exactly like any one else's, which can only be generally and, as it were, by scraps traced to any definite influence—was shown as well in the early written, though not early published,

You know the old, while I know the new,  
But to-morrow you shall know this too "

" Oh ! not to-morrow into the dark, I pray I  
Oh, not to-morrow ! too soon to go away—  
Here I feel warm and well content and gay  
Give me another year, another day ! "

" Indeed I loved you, my chosen friend,  
I loved you for life, but life has an end  
Through sickness I was ready to tend,  
But death mars all, which we cannot mend "

Now observe that the staple measure here is, in a way, anapaestic dimeter, but only the *fourth* stanza goes perfectly into this In the first and second we have extra-metrical syllables in certain lines, with a very *obbligato* rhythm, and the third is almost pure iambic decasyllable—a measure which, do what you will, cannot be forced on the second and fourth, though it may on the first The fact is that the poetess has chosen a kind of "croon patter" or musical doggerel, relying mainly on the monorhymes and a central pause

<sup>1</sup> *Time Flies* (1885), *The Face of the Deep* (1892), and others.

"Birds of Paradise,"<sup>1</sup> where the verses float and flash like the subjects, as in that ineffable

Heaven overarches earth and sea,<sup>2</sup>

which was certainly one of the last things she wrote, and which one likes to think of as the very last

Sonnets and  
general  
quality

Pages would not suffice for a full analysis of her infinite variety, and the very shortness of this notice must be taken as a tribute to it. Her sonnets, however, seem to require a little special mention, even after that which has been given to her brother's. They have less varied interest of subject, and, naturally enough for more reasons than one, less brilliancy of colour and elaborate artistry of language. But sometimes—as, for instance, in "Monna Innominata"<sup>3</sup>—they seem to me to have the

<sup>1</sup> Golden-winged, silver winged,  
Winged with flaming flame—  
Such a flight of birds I saw—  
Birds without a name—  
Singing songs in their own tongue,  
Song of songs—they came

On wings of flame they went and came  
With a cadenced clung,  
Then silver wings tinkled,  
Their golden wings rang  
The wind it whistled through their wings  
Where, in Heaven, they sang

<sup>2</sup> Heaven overarches earth and sea—  
Earth's sadness and sea's bitterness  
Heaven overarches you and me  
A little while and we shall be—  
Praise God—where there is no more sea  
Nor barren wilderness

Heaven overarches you and me,  
And all earth's gardens and her graves  
Look up with me, until we see  
The day break and the shadows flee—  
What though to-night wrecks you and me  
If so to-morrow saves?

<sup>3</sup> A "Sonnet of Sonnets." Here is the last of the fourteen  
Youth gone and beauty gone, if ever there  
Dwelt beauty in so poor a face as this,  
Youth gone and beauty, what remains of bliss?  
I will not bind fresh roses in my hair,  
To shame a cheek at best but little fair—  
Leave youth his roses, who can bear a thorn

real verse-essence of the English Petrarchian sonnet as absolutely no others have it, not even Dante Gabriel's. On the whole, late nineteenth-century poetry has hardly, on the formal side, a more characteristic and more gifted exponent than Christina Rossetti. Read her, and read all of her.

Some stock repetitions of phrase are almost inevitable Canon Dixon in this History, but I may accompany the old remark that one can only glance here, if even that, at the general poetic merit of poets, with something more, in the case of one who has so much missed his due recognition as the late Canon Dixon. I regret nothing of the kind so strongly as that I never came across *Christ's Company* (1861). Indeed, though, like all Oxford men of my generation who cared for poetry, I had dimly heard of him for many years the first book of his that came into my hands was the second edition of *Mano* (1883). This he was good enough to send me himself, more years after the appearance (1891) even of that second than before his own death, and at a time when, unluckily, I was so deeply engaged in professional work that I could not give it proper study, and follow that study up by exploring its earlier fellows. It is, in fact, only since the bulk of this chapter and part of this notice was written, and within the last few months, that Mr Bridges' selection<sup>1</sup> has made it easy to take something of a general view of his verse, and I hope heartily that this will be followed by a complete issue. That verse, indeed, can never be popular. Mr Bridges has compared it to Blake's, and not without truth, both in regard to its astonishing poetic

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I will not seek for blossom anywhere,  
 Except such common flowers as blow with corn  
 Youth gone and beauty gone, what doth remain?  
 The longing of a heart, pent up, forlorn,  
     A silent heart whose silence loves and longs,  
     The silence of a heart which sang its songs  
 While youth and beauty made a summer morn,  
 Silence of love that cannot sing again

One ought to have, illuminated over this sonnet, the face of the third Queen in her brother's drawing for the "Palace of Art"

<sup>1</sup> London, 1909



quality and to its want of finish. But whereas with Blake, even in face of his own alterations, we never feel that he wanted to bring out something *and failed*, some of us do feel this frequently with Dixon. I should myself describe him as a half-Morris who had met a half-Meredith and combined, as well, a strong reminiscence of Beddoes. Now it requires long time and happy influence to *cure* that blend into a succeeded wine. The time was not wanting, but occupation—for the Canon was an active cleric, and almost a great historian—interfered, and perhaps the happy influences were wanting too.

But not always. If you are content with poetry in the matrix, you cannot open a page of the *Selections* without finding it, and you must be hard to please, or (with pardon) not worth pleasing, if you do not find it freed from that matrix, and cut, and polished, and set, in "To Shadow,"<sup>1</sup> and "Mercy," and the "Summer Ode," and "The Feathers of the Willow," and many another, including the most Blake-like of all, "Fallen Rain."<sup>2</sup>

The lack of "finish," however, which Mr Bridges admits, makes it very difficult to treat the mere prosody of these things—much more than in Blake's case, for, as was just remarked, one is never sure, in Dixon's, that the craftsman was not hammering at some form that he could not get hammered out to his own satisfaction. I may refer those who are curious on this point to the very fine "Ode on Advancing Age," an inadequate specimen of

<sup>1</sup> This, too, has a fine and original prosodic movement, rather *Beddoesian*, as not a little of Dixon is

If ever thou didst creep  
From out the world of sleep,  
When the sun slips and the moon dips,  
If ever thou wast born,  
Or upon the starving lips  
Of the gray uncoloured morn

<sup>2</sup> Silent fell the rain  
To the earthly ground,  
Then arose a sound  
To complain

"Why am I cast down  
From the cloud so sweet,  
Triumpled by the feet  
Of the clown?"

which I give below<sup>1</sup> It will be seen at once that this is a remarkable example of what I have called elsewhere "later nineteenth-century Pindaric" — *not* rhymeless But the rhythmical basis looks like an uncompleted experiment In the portion given (the whole is unluckily too long) there is no doubt about this being iambic, even

That recedes and leaves it waif-wrinkled, gap-rocked, weak,  
is a boldly, but not too boldly, substituted decasyllable  
But on the opposite page occur these lines—

To thy crashing step answers the doted cries  
And on dipping wing flies  
'Tis their silence!

where there is no case of substitution, but the base is frankly anapæstic This may, of course, have been the effect of the malediction of Geraldine, as we may prosodically oppose it to the benediction of *Christabel*—a mere following, half careless, of the one mistake of Coleridge But it may not

Interesting, and even intensely interesting, therefore, *Mano* and its  
as the lyrics are poetically—interesting after a fashion to *metre*  
which those of Beddoes himself are the nearest true  
parallel—there can be little doubt that, for a historian  
of English prosody, who tries to make his book more  
than a thesaurus of prosodic *quodlibeta*, their author must,  
or at least may, be treated as the author of *Mano* mainly  
I have more than once referred to this remarkable poem  
as the capital and, probably for a long, if not all time, the  
standard, example of English *terza rima*, and, while  
making some remarks on that metre elsewhere, have

<sup>1</sup> Thou goest more and more  
To the silent things thy hair is hoar,  
Emptier thy weary face like to the shore  
Far-ruined, and the desolate billow white  
That recedes and leaves it waif-wrinkled, gap-rocked, weak  
The shore and the billow white  
Groan—they cry and rest not they would speak  
And call the eternal Night  
To cease them for ever, bidding new things issue  
From her cold tissue  
Night that is ever young, nor knows decay,  
Though older by eternity than they

always postponed fuller consideration of it to this place. These promissory notes must now be taken up, with the observation (which is by no means intended as an evasion of payment in full) that the criticisms I shall make, though I hope they will be intelligible to the reader, require as "justifying pieces" a much larger selection from the poem itself than could possibly be given here.

It is not a poem to read hurriedly, and I believe that I have myself given it the fullest advantages in this respect. I made it, for some considerable time, my pastime-book during those intervals of routine official work when one's duty is rather episcopal than what Spaniards still call "cathedralical"—when one sits in the chair instead of speaking from it, in other words, during examination hours. A book must be dull indeed which is not felt at such times to be a rock (of varying greatness, doubtless) in a weary land, and *Mano* is the very reverse of dull at any time. Its period interests me, I like its tone and style, I do not mind, as some people would, the hazy chronicle-construction which floats you about promiscuously, without any definite promise or performance of landing you anywhere in any given time. Finally, it is a romance, and a verse-romance, and of romances, but especially verse-romances, I am prepared to speak with hardly less than the abandonment of Miss Snevellicci's papa—"I love them *all*."

But I cannot say that its verse-vehicle has much part in my love, or if it has, the part is so occasional as hardly to count, while occasionally also it distinctly interferes with my affection. It may be said that, in reading English *terza*, it is unfair to make Italian, and especially the *terza* of Dante, a constant or even an occasional standard of comparison. I should admit this in a sense, perhaps, as readily as most people—perhaps more readily than most. *No* metre is the same in any two languages; most, if not all, metres are absolutely different in any two languages. This is what the good people who try to trace the varieties of Chaucer's decasyllable to contemporary French do not know, this is why, to the

disappointment of some whom I am specially sorry to disappoint, I have paid very little attention in this book to the tracing of foreign "origins" They say that the experiment of sowing tobacco ground in Manilla with Havana seed has been tried over and over again, and that sooner or later the quality of the leaf is purely Philippine In prosody it is not the case sooner or later it happens at once<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore no argument *per se* against the English *terza*, that it does not produce the effect of Dante's, but it is important historically to point out the fact that it does not Of this fact there is no doubt, and though we have seen some earlier illustrations of it, there has been no opportunity for this fact to display itself so fully as it does in *Mano* The author, I have said, was no inexpert poet or prosodist, and here at least he was no incompletely experimental one He was no prosodic crotcheteer, he was not a man of one metre it is perfectly clear that he had first soaked himself in the original examples of *terza*, and had then elaborated his kind with the utmost sedulity Let us see what he did with it, and what he did not do with it, in other words, how his differs from Dante's, and then what are its own weaknesses

In the first place, like all the other English terceteers whom we have met, he either discards or neglects, or, while aiming at it, fails to achieve, that remarkable *separation* of tercet, without abruptness, which is perhaps the dominant prosodic note of the *Commedia* I take my usual dips, and in thirty lines of Dante I find one enjambment, in thirty lines of Dixon I find four consecutively In the second place, there is the old great gulf of the double and single rhyme That the author of *Mano* was quite right in discarding the double I have no doubt whatever To begin with, there are, of course, not enough doubles in English, without a lavishing of inflections which would be simply disgusting But there is a

<sup>1</sup> We shall have to notice a further bearing of this fact when we come to the hexameter and its fellows

stronger reason even than this that double rhymes in English narrative verse, whether couplet or stanza, are always dangerous things, and, if frequently repeated, destructive. Now I myself doubt whether you *can* get the *terza* effect without the double rhyme it gives just the fluctuant arrest, within the form and at the close of it, which is wanted for its total effect<sup>1</sup>

On a third point—the avoidance of strong stops inside the lines—Dixon has drawn nearer to Dante than most English *terza*-writers, and has done well, but not without corresponding disadvantage

But as has been so frankly acknowledged, part at least of this is not necessarily against the medium at all. For the reasons above stated, and many others, it is not, or ought not to be, the poet's business to imitate successfully, but to produce something good in itself. Is the metre of *Mano* good in itself? I cannot think so. I do not think that it is even part-cause of the fineness of the fine passages. I think it is sometimes dead in the way of their fineness. Above all, I cannot imagine anybody taking pleasure in it, as King Honour married the lady, "for its comely face, and for its fair bodie", but only as King Easter and King Wester courted her, for its lands of great association and its fee of Dantean echo. In the first place, it has the capital defect—almost the unpardonable sin—of suggesting something else a fault inseparable from English *terza* ever since the days of Wyatt. For instance, here are seven beautiful lines, making a more beautiful poetic whole—itsself part of another more beautiful and larger still

Thou hast thy mate, thy nest on lowly plain,  
Thy timid heart, by law ineffable,  
Is drawn from the high heavens, where thou shouldst reign  
Earth summons thee by her most tender spell  
For thee there is a silence and a song,  
Thy silence in the shadowy earth must dwell,  
Thy song in the bright heavens cannot be long

---

<sup>1</sup> In yet other words, you want the quasi trochaic *suggestion*, on which I have several times dwelt, and which is so different from—which, indeed, necessitates the presence of something else than—a trochaic *basis*

(I do not think it unfair to take, with warning, the licence of discarding the mechanical intimation of the *terza* by indenting or leading)

Now, I say that these lines are beautiful, and that they make a beautiful passage. But if anybody met them, quoted somewhere as I have printed them, and did not know whence they came, and what metre they were in, would the *terza* strike him *first* with the inevitableness which all great metre possesses when once the single line is outpassed? I do not think so. On the contrary, they suggest blank verse with straggling *Lycidas*-like rhymes, or two quatrains, the last uncompleted, or a kind of disturbed rhyme-royal<sup>1</sup>. A line so fine, but so limited and complete in itself—so sharply truncated by the strong masculine rhyme completing the sense—as

For thee there is a silence and a song,

is a sort of wedge driven into the body of the undulating and serpentine tercet. It produces a disruption which would be impossible with a trochaic ending-sound, and almost shows of itself why the metre is not suited to English.

As a consequence of this, and of other things, we find—at least I find—that the best way to enjoy *Mano* is not to think of the metre at all. There are many, no doubt, who would say, "So much the better." But I can hardly be expected to take that point of view, and to those who take it I would once more remark, "Why do you ever read anything but prose?" Perhaps, after all, they *don't*. It is all prose to them. Now *Mano* is far indeed from being prose, but I do not think it was happy when it came to the Fair of Verses and made its selection.

Almost as remarkable prosodically as any of the work dealt with in this chapter, though much less remarked (till, many years after their publication, and not a few after the poet's own death, the late Mr Palgrave included some of them in the second part of the *Golden Treasury*), were the poems of Arthur O'Shaughnessy. I remember

O'Shaughnessy *The Epic of Women.*

<sup>1</sup> I have said (i. 311) that Wyatt's tercets actually suggest confusion of this kind.

being specially struck with *The Epic of Women* (1870), when it first came out, from this particular point of view. The *differentiae* were both general and particular. In the first place, Mr O'Shaughnessy combined with the general atmosphere of mediæval and Renaissance preciousness, with the foreshadowing of blue china and brass tray, a peculiar *facility*, which has always been characteristic of Irish word-musicians since Moore at least—the air almost of an *improvisatore*. He was in this respect, as in some others, more like Poe than like any purely English poet, but his production was not only much more extensive, it was much more learned than Poe's, though I doubt whether he had ever considered prosody with that intuitive though headlong science which gives the American an almost unique position. The very opening piece shows this quality in the remarkable *knitting* of the stanzas throughout<sup>1</sup>. You can no more break them than you can a Spenserian, though they are smaller and move quicker, and the total clangour reached is quite extraordinary. "Seraphitus" has something of the same effect in a slightly different measure, but this is more artificially fashioned. The ordinary "long measure" is moulded to no common purpose in "Bisclaveret," and the ordinary decasyllabic quatrain in "Creation" and "Cleopatra." The "pull-up" metre of the "Glorious Lady"<sup>2</sup> does not achieve the effect of strongly shortened alternative lines as Browning did in "Love among the Ruins" or as Margaret Voley did in "A Japanese Fan" (see next chapter). But three or four pieces of swinging measure once more show O'Shaughnessy's exceptional prosodic power.

<sup>1</sup> A common folk I walk among,  
I speak dull things in their own tongue,  
But all the while within I hear  
A song I do not sing for fear—  
How sweet, how different a thing!  
And when I come where none are near  
I open all my heart, and sing

<sup>2</sup> I see you, in the time that's fled,  
Long dead,  
I see you, in the years to be,  
After me

"The Fountain of Tears,"<sup>1</sup> which I believe has been his most popular thing, is his most Poesque, no one, so far as I remember, has ever come so completely up to Poe's peculiar value and adjustment of this anapæst, so that it is strung with a looseness that does not jangle or jar, but does add a sort of internal echo and extra-music "Charmed Moments"<sup>2</sup> is more commonplace, but the finale, "The Poet's Grave," recovers, and varies the idiosyncrasy of the foot.<sup>3</sup>

I am not, however, sure that the finest thing O'Shaughnessy ever did prosodically is not a piece which I have for that reason postponed—the "Barcarolle" The  
"Barcarolle"  
In mere specification there is nothing peculiar about it, nothing in the very least new it is simply the old fourcener, hardly, or not at all, different (to people who count by syllables and stresses) from those that Robert of Gloucester had written six hundred years before. The only difference (except the floating and uncertain suggestion of internal rhyme) that the mathematical and specifying system—which some have been sad or cross at not finding in these poor volumes—could find, is that the verses, instead of running in continuous pairs, are separated by "white lines" first into a couplet and then into sets of four. Those, however, who hear with ears (regardless of the charge of "affectations"), and not with eyes and fingers only will soon perceive that even in this arrangement there is more than the white line tells—that there is separate and subtle musical value in these batches. And still earlier, these same ears will have told their

<sup>1</sup> If you go over desert and mountain,  
Far into the country of sorrow,  
To day and to night and to morrow,  
And maybe for months and for years,  
You shall come with a heart that is bursting  
For trouble and toiling and thirsting—  
You shall certainly come to the Fountain  
At length—to the Fountain of Tears

<sup>2</sup> The sky is a brilliant enamel,  
The sea is a beautiful gem, etc

<sup>3</sup> But the tall mad flower whose head is crowned  
With the long lax petals that fall and flap  
Like the ears of a fool's bell-cap



owners that the line itself has quite special quality,<sup>1</sup> that it is fingered into something different from the fourteeners of anybody else. The secret of giving individuality to the fourteeners lies, as it lies with most long metres, in the management of the pause—which management includes, and virtually depends upon, the balancing and varying of the feet on either side of that pause.<sup>2</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, the writer of this metre will always be exposed to the same influences which originally split it up into the “common measure.” But he is at liberty to admit them, resist them, or take and leave them at his pleasure. O’Shaughnessy uses this liberty in the right English fashion. He generally employs the exact cæsure at the eighth syllable, but neglects it at the third line—

The wave is very still—the rud|dei loosens in our hand ,  
and even prolongs the “leave over,” as in a specially fine line—

O what shall be the choice of bar|carolle or lullaby ?

He usually again adopts the exact measure, but again admits redundancy,<sup>3</sup> and uses it with great effect. He generally has internal half-rhyme, but does not mind omitting it, and he usually stops his lines, but indulges

<sup>1</sup> The stars are dimly seen among the shadows of the bay,  
And lights that win are seen in strife with lights that die away

The wave is very still—the rudder loosens in our hand ,  
The zephyr will not fill our sail, and waft us to the land ,  
O precious is the pause between the winds that come and go,  
And sweet the silence of the shores between the ebb and flow

Our heart in all our life is like the hand of one who steers  
A bark upon an ocean rife with dangers and with fears  
The joys, the hopes, like waves or wings, bear up this life of ours—  
Shout as a song of all these things that make up all its hours

<sup>2</sup> I may be excused for referring to what has been said on Chapman (ii 108 sq.)

<sup>3</sup> As in the first couplet of this splendid quatrain

Say, shall we sing of day or night, fair land or mighty ocean,  
Of any rapturous delight or any dear emotion,  
Of any joy that is on earth, or hope that is above,  
The holy country of our birth, or any song of love ?

in enjambment when he chooses. By these varieties, all sedulously attuned, and kept so as to avoid any breach of rhythm, he achieves the combined knitting and unknitting which is the master secret of verse, which Chaucer had achieved in his stanza, Shakespeare and Milton in blanks, and the best masters of the octosyllable there also, while the defect of the commonest heroic couplet is its absence. But he also has something more: he has marked *pulses* in his feet, and the great central quatrain given throbs not monotonously, but with the motion of a living heart against a living hand<sup>1</sup>.

O'Shaughnessy's gift was essentially lyrical, and it *Lays of France* did not show to the best advantage in the curious paraphrase-embroidery of Marie which he next published under the title of *Lays of France* (1872). The fact is that the originals, which are supposed to have been dedicated to Henry III, our *Re della semplice vita* (I wonder if he read them to while away the time in the Valley of Princes?) are so agreeable that one does not want them altered much. And I think that, if her translator was determined to give them in English, the not un-nervous blank verse used in the *Epic*, or the enjambed couplet afterwards used in "*Colibri*," would have done better than the octosyllable, wrought into elaborate irregular stanzas, which he uses here. There are beautiful things in the book, but it contrasts most unfortunately with some not at all dissimilar parts in the slightly earlier *Earthly Paradise*, and one feels that the medium is the wrong one for narrative. Nor need we take much account of the posthumous *Songs of a Worker* (1881), which were not *Songs of a Worker* published by him as a book, while many were written either under the pressure of recent sorrow, or with "purposes" of various kinds. The fourteeners of the opening song here are strangely wanting in the life and colour of those of the "*Barcarolle*." But the above-mentioned "*Colibri*"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Almost the only blot on this supremely beautiful thing is the rhyme of "risen" and "horizon." But this is, again, Irish in its carelessness.

<sup>2</sup> Partly in the highly enjambed couplet spoken of, partly in other metres, especially an octosyllabic couplet reminding one rather of Darley's *Nepenthe*.

is interesting, and "Growing on a Grave" is a beautifully moulded lyric,<sup>1</sup>

When the Rose came I loved the Rose<sup>2</sup>

once more recovers the undying fragrance of the seventeenth-century censer, and there are many other things that, in a special study of the poet, one would have to notice

*Music and  
Moonlight*

But the general character of his prosody is perhaps best shown in *Music and Moonlight*, which he published (1874) in rapid succession to the *Epic* and the *Lays*. It opens with a wonderful piece of metre—octaves of three-foot anapæsts rhymed on only two sounds *abababab*, and distinguished by the large number of monosyllabic feet at the opening of the stanza, and the redundance, varied in alternate stanzas as shown below,<sup>3</sup> of the odd lines. That

<sup>1</sup> Love, on your grave in the ground  
Sweet flowers I planted are growing,  
Lilies and violets abound,  
Pansies border it round,  
And cowslips all of my sowing  
A creeper is trying to cover  
Your nune with a kiss like a lover

<sup>2</sup> When the Rose came I loved the Rose  
And thought of none beside,  
Forgetting all the other flowers,  
And all the others died  
And morn and noon and sun and showers,  
And all things, loved the Rose,  
Who only half returned my love,  
Blooming alike for those

<sup>3</sup> We are the music-makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams  
World losers and world-forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams,  
For we are the movers and shakers  
Of the world for ever, it seems  
With wonderful deathless ditties  
We build up the world's great cities,  
And out of a fabulous story  
We fashion an empire's glory,  
One man with a dream, at pleasure,  
Shall go forth and conquer a crown,  
And three with a new song's measure  
Can trample a kingdom down

strongly marked beat or pulse or throb, which has been cited as a gift of O'Shaughnessy's, reappears, and yet there is hardly any verse anywhere in which you would lose more if you scanned only by beats. For the cunning variation of monosyllable, dissyllable, and trisyllable would disappear, and you would get mere irregular "Catharina" or Praed-stanza without the special idiosyncrasy.

And this leads up an even dangerously excited expectation to something fully satisfying, the long concerted piece of "Music and Moonlight" itself. Here the central metre (as we may call it) of enjambed couplets, with rhyme alternate and cross when it pleases, frames certain songs of which the chief is a really exquisite thing, the rapid spinning hum deflecting and forging itself out into fresh harmonies in a magical fashion<sup>1</sup>. The more commonplace measure of

Has summer come without the rose?

is faultless in its kind, which is often so faulty. And there is certainly nothing commonplace in another—

She has gone wandering, wandering away,

which I never heard set to music,<sup>2</sup> but which seems to set itself as clearly as anything well can, and which *in part* is one of the few pretty distinctly dactylic things in English, though, as usual, you *can* shift it to the dactyl's ally the trochee. "May," the "Song of Betrothal," and others cry for notice, but cannot have it. Nor can the special handling of general measure in the "Song of

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Once in a hundred years<br/>Thou shalt forget thy tears,<br/>And all thy life shall flower<br/>Into one infinite hour</p> | <p>If thou wilt flee the bliss<br/>Of each dull earthly kiss,<br/>Then thou shalt joy like this—<br/>Once in a hundred years</p> |
|--|--|

- 2 O'Shaughnessy was enthusiastically musical

She has gone wandering, wandering away,  
Very sad madness hath taken her to day  
Would I might hold her by her hair's golden mass,  
By her two feet, her girdle, her whole self in the glass  
Of the years past that change not, though she change and stray

(Even here, let it be observed, the irrepressible cuckoo anapest will not be denied, but forces itself into the latter part.)

Palms,"<sup>1</sup> and "Outcry," and the "Disease of the Soul"—Poesque again, but independent enough. The Whitmanian "Earth" may be left till we come to Whitman himself, but a stanza from "Nostalgie des Cieux" must be given.<sup>2</sup>

For this shows, though in less out-of-the-way fashion than some others, the quality which has given O'Shaughnessy what some no doubt will think his disproportionate place here—the quality which I am trying to make out as a historian, and which results from the immense advantage given to the poet by the variation and freedom of prosodic arrangement reached within, and only within, the nineteenth century. Now, as never before, he is able *proprie communia dicere*, now, as never before, he can give his own colour and his own accent to the verse.

This chapter would not be complete without some prosodic notice of the work of that remarkable and in many ways ill-starred poet, James Thomson the Second, who was, in all things but poetic gift, almost the exact contrary of James Thomson the First, and on whom it would have been most interesting to try the effect of a skilfully exhibited course of Indolence, Comfort, and consequent Optimism. The various prosodic experiments in *The City of Dreadful Night* itself<sup>3</sup> are interesting, because the inequality of their effect is exactly what might be

James Thom-  
son II

<sup>1</sup> Mighty, luminous, and calm  
Is the country of the palm,  
Crowned with sunset and sunrise,  
Under blue unbroken skies,  
Waving from green zone to zone,  
Over wonders of its own,  
Trackless, untraversed, unknown,  
Changeless through the centuries

<sup>2</sup> How far away, among the hazy lands  
That float beneath the rising sun's new rim,  
Ere intervening seas swell to their brim—  
How far away are thy enchanted sands,  
Thou half-remembered country, whose sweet hands  
Anointed me with splendours! Mystic bands  
Draw back my dreams to thee, till all grows dim,  
And in my eyes the tears of yearning swim

<sup>3</sup> In book form 1880, with *Other Poems*, but partly printed in 1874, and dated 1870-74 for composition.

expected from a *selfpista*—a man whose education, though regular up to a certain point, had not reached exact scholarship, and whose enthusiastic private study was not assisted by that atmosphere and tradition of cultivated breeding which smiles at mere "education." His opening septet, with an unvarying double rhyme in the fifth and sixth places, but none elsewhere, is not a success, the recurrence annoys instead of pleasing<sup>1</sup> The peculiar *newvain* which follows (at section iv) is much better,<sup>2</sup> but perhaps a little devoid of naturalness, nor are any of the other attempts quite successful, while the recurrence of the septet in the great "Melancholia" finale is a pity But just before that finale—in fact in part of it, in the Battle of the Sphinx and the Angel—the poet falls back, fortunately, on an old and well-tried metre, the sixain with final couplet which opens the *Shepherd's Kalendar*, and uses it magnificently In fact I do not know a finer example of the form, nor one in which the special opportunity given by it—of *recoil* by couplet on quatrain—is better taken

Nor do I know that he shows himself anywhere else master of metre to quite the same extent, though he shows everywhere the remarkable *experiment* noted pre-

<sup>1</sup> I ought, no doubt, to give an example, and I will give one which may seem to rebuke me

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles,  
To show the bitter, old, and wrinkled truth  
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,  
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth,  
Because it gives some sense of power and passion  
In helpless impotence to try to fashion  
Our woe in living words, howe'er uncouth

A very poor creature is he who does not know that "cold rage", but it does not necessitate redundancy regularly

<sup>2</sup> (The italicised parts have been repeated several times.)

*As I came through the desert thus it was,*  
*As I came through the desert* but once more  
And I was close upon a wild seashore,  
Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,  
The deep tide thundered up a league broad strand,  
White foam belts seethed there, wan spray swept and flew,  
The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue.

*And I strode on austere*  
*No hope could have no fear*

viously, and characteristic of the school to which, therefore, he really belongs. Metre with him is, again, to some extent in the matrix, though not clumsy or unpolished, it never gets quite free. In the lighter kinds especially, the constant danger of "immersion in the black waves of lethargy"<sup>1</sup> seems to numb his touch. In "Sunday at Hampstead" and "Sunday up the River" several of the pieces are close to great metrical success. "As we rush, as we rush in the train" needs but the last concoction to be what it very nearly is, an anapæstic mixture of rare and novel beauty. "Like violets pale in the spring of the year" comes closer, but to something less rare, though charming in itself. The sevens of "The Naked Goddess" are all right, indeed a poet who is a poet can hardly go wrong with that metre, since Shakespeare showed the trick of it for once, in an imitable manner. And his own "Castle of Indolence" is effective, though he has evidently and naturally taken Shelley for his model of the metre rather than his namesake and title-giver, or Spenser himself. So are the Browningsque octosyllables of *Vane's Story*.<sup>2</sup> Seldom perhaps, though he is never wanting in poetry, does he raise his prosodic power to individuality. But he does this in the extremely beautiful "The fire that filled my heart of old," in the almost finer—certainly equal—"Song of Sighing," and in the splendid "Insomnia."<sup>3</sup> In this last, however, he resorts to the curious penultimate couplet of double rhyme. It is rather a study to discover why this strikes a false note, but I think I have got the verb conjugated in my trunk. The danger of the double rhyme in English—a danger intensified in triple—is that of comic suggestion, and Thomson does not guard against this as fully as Mr Swinburne did.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Addē quod in nigras lethargi mergitur unaas*

(Lucr. III. 841)

<sup>2</sup> *Vane's Story, and other Poems* (London, 1881)

<sup>3</sup> *A Voice from the Nile, and other Poems* (London, 1884)

<sup>4</sup> He is hard to sample, you want, as a rule, several stanzas to get his atmosphere. Here are parts of two prosodic lyrics and a stanza of "Insomnia"

The fire that filled my heart of old  
Gave lustre while it burned,

Now only ashes grey and cold,  
Are in its silence urned  
Ah ! better was the furious flame,  
The splendour with the smart  
I never cared for the singer's fame,  
But oh ! for the singer's heart  
Once more—  
The burning fulgent heart !

Like violets pale i' the spring o' the year  
Came my Love's sad eyes to my youth,  
Wan and dim, with many a tear,  
But the sweeter for that in sooth  
Wet and dim,  
Tender and true,\*  
Violet eyes  
Of the sweetest blue

Men sigh and plain and wail how life is brief  
Ah ! yes, our bright eternities of bliss  
Are transient, rare, minute beyond belief,  
Mere star-dust meteors in Time's night abyss  
Ah ! no, our black eternities intense  
Of bale are lasting, dominant, immense  
As Time, which is their breath  
The memory of the bliss is yearning sorrow,  
The memory of the bale clouds every morrow,  
Darkening a thousand nights and days unto the night of Death



## CHAPTER II

### OTHER POETS OF 1850-1900

Restrictions—Mr George Meredith—Comparison of Emily Brontë's "Remembrance", Faber's "Pilgrims of the Night", and Lord Lytton's "Astarte"—Miss Veley "A Japanese Fan"—Lord De Tabley—Mr Henley—John Davidson—Francis Thompson—Coventry Patmore—The revival of the *ballade* and similar forms—Some more dead poets, and some live ones

Restrictions THIS chapter, like at least one other in the present Book, is rather a "thorn-chapter" (as Thackeray would have said) to its author, for, whatever he does with it, he is sure to displease somebody. That being so, there is nothing to do but to announce intention, and stick to it. It is proposed to include here a few—but only a few—examples of the prosody of the later nineteenth century from poets other than those mentioned in the last chapter, and, according to the plan which has been pursued in all the literary histories I have written, not to dwell, distinctly and in detail, on the work of any living poet<sup>1</sup>. And further, I propose, even in the instances I do give, to dwell rather on points than on persons, rather on specimen and characteristic metres than on bodies of prosodic work. I think this is justified—first by the *force majeure* of space, and secondly by obvious if less dignified reasons of convenience and opportunism, but thirdly and chiefly, as well as most satisfactorily, by the very full examination, which has been given in the last chapter, of the most representative examples of the period, and by certain considerations of a general

<sup>1</sup> In the next chapter this rule will have to be slightly infringed, but we shall have to deal there with professed *experiment*

character which will be, I hope, duly marshalled in the Conclusion. In the first place, therefore, let us levy our proposed tribute—not so haphazard as it may perhaps look—on the dead

It would be a needless provocation to those admirers of the late Mr Meredith who will have him to be a great poet, as well as a great novelist, to omit all mention of his prosody, but it would be a disrespect to himself (a matter of much more importance) to give it any more than brief notice. In fact, *il l'a voulu* in a much more deliberate fashion than that in which his poor namesake "would have" something else. The "Promise in Disturbance" gives a perfectly clear warning,<sup>1</sup> which is quite legitimately fulfilled. As a matter of fact, of course, Mr Meredith is often better than his word, and we have no reason or right to complain when he simply keeps it. I used to think that a verse of one of the doleful ballads of the later seventeenth century on Bothwell Brig quoted by Scott—

The Lowdian Mallisha they  
Came in their coats of blew  
Five hundred men from London came  
Clad in a reddish hew,

was, even without the spelling, the *ne plus ultra* of bathetic prosody, or prosodic bathos, in common measure. But Mr Meredith's "Archduchess Anne" excels it in this respect, if only because it is fully rhymed

"I am a man of many sins  
Who for one virtue die,"  
Count Louis said "They play at shins  
Who kick," was the reply

Yet he meant it, of course

I suppose that, in that curious literary-fantastic realism of his, which must have been half begotten by, and half a revolt from, the unliterary-fantastic realism of Dickens, he would always have liked to mean it, and therefore tried

<sup>1</sup> With its mention of "one false note," "a jangled strain,"  
"a newly added chord"

Commanding space *beyond where ear has home*,"

"the rebel discords," etc

out-of-the-way measures like galliambics, sometimes, as in their finale—

Ever wailful trees bemoaning him, a bruised purple cyclamen—

hardly to be distinguished from prose,<sup>1</sup> or like the jumpy little rhythms, sometimes internally jingled, of "Woodman and Echo," etc. But somehow or other he could not always be meaning it, the merciful Muse would not always either tolerate or punish him. The blessed old trochaic sevens assert their gentle mastery in "The Woods of Westerman", there is a Rossetti-like stateliness in "A Ballad of Past Meridian". The Arnoldian three-foot anapaests of "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" have a subtle music, the octosyllabic couplets of the "Lark Ascending" would not have been scorned by Marvell, and in "Love in the Valley," at least, our auto-Marsyas leaves off trying to flay his own body and his readers' ears, and shows himself master of the lyre of Apollo himself. Never was the ancestral "The Queen was in the Parlour" measure touched to a sweeter, freer variation,<sup>2</sup> never were we at greater advantage in asphodel. Elsewhere you shall find the unpretentious grace of "Marian" and the trickless grandeur of "Lucifer in Starlight" face to face on one page-opening, in the recent two-volume edition. But I suppose the real Meredithian (it is necessary to do no more than glance at Wilkes) regards these things as derogations.

Comparison  
of Emily  
Brontë's  
'Remem-  
brance',  
Faber's  
'Pilgrims of  
the Night'

An unusually interesting subject for prosodic study is furnished by two very well-known compositions, Emily Brontë's great "Remembrance" and Faber's famous hymn "Pilgrims of the Night".<sup>3</sup> I do not know whether

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, many fine lines in "Phaethon."

<sup>2</sup> It has in fact got itself a *Sapphic* hint and tint.

<sup>3</sup> Cold in the earth, and the deep snow piled above thee,  
Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave,  
Have I forgot, my only love, to love thee,  
Severed at last by Time's all severing wave?

Hark! hark! my soul! angelic songs are swelling  
O'er earth's green fields, and ocean's wave-bent shore

Faber had "Remembrance" in his head,<sup>1</sup> but there are some remarkable verbal resemblances, although no sort of "plagiarism." The prosodic scheme, however, of the two stanzas (the refrain-couplet of the hymn is, save for a purpose to be noticed presently, purely separable) is absolutely identical from one point of view—iambic five-foot quatrain with redundancy in the odd lines. Miss Bronte, indeed, has perhaps disguised this from very careless folk by admitting a substituted trisyllabic foot in the first line of the first and second stanzas, as well as once or twice elsewhere. But the base-schemes are quite the same, and a large number of lines are undistinguishable if separately considered. The prosodic turn given to the two is, however, distinctly different, or rather most interestingly developed in different directions, and I do not think that the tune which is the hymn's most familiar accompaniment is in the least responsible<sup>2</sup> for giving the idea of this development, though another certainly expresses it in a manner which does credit to the setter, whoever he was. Miss Bronte had happened, rather because of her subject than of anything else, to make a strong cæsure at the fourth syllable, and she repeats it often, but not invariably or in such a way as to impose itself on the ear. Faber, I suppose, seeing the musical capabilities of this, takes the hint of it, and the other hint of the strong word and slight subsequent pause at "Cold," and makes them the basis of *his* fingering of the measure, while, to impress it on the dullest ear, he adds the refrain with a strong "section."

Then having compared these two, let the student and Lord  
proceed to compare them further with a sort of parallel Lytton's  
"Astarte"

How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling  
Of that new life when sin shall be no more!  
Angels of Jesus! angels of light!  
Singing to welcome the Pilgrims of the Night

<sup>1</sup> The "Poems by *Three Sisters*," as we may call them, were, I have reason to believe, well known at Oxford long before the general accepted them. They appeared in 1846, "Hark! hark! my soul!" in 1854.

<sup>2</sup> In fact neither of the tunes, "Pilgrims" and "Vox Angelica," given in the older editions of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, brings out the character I do not know the name of the more successful one.

in trochaic cadence The thing will be found ready done to his hand<sup>1</sup> in the second Lord Lytton's beautiful "Astarte" (or "Fata Morgana")

Should I fail to find her out by her gold tresses,  
Brows and breast and lips and language of sweet strains—  
I shall know her by the traces of dead kisses,  
And that portion of myself which she retains

(I cannot prevent the old Adam in me from wishing he had written "trace of dead *caresses*", but this is wrong, and perhaps in more ways than one)

The almost uncanny way in which iamb and trochee "play up" to each other by passing a syllable to and fro, and reconstituting themselves in new likeness, while retaining that portion of their old selves which is congruous, appears here. Both metres, in this form, have a curious power of expressing *saudades*—love and regret mingled, this seems to be (though they *can* do other work) as distinctly their portion in serious poetry as some other privileges which have been pointed out elsewhere. And once more, in studying them, one reflects on the utter loss of all beauty—the presence of baldness and blankness instead—the disappearance of the "excellent differences"—that comes if one regards them merely as groups of accents, with a few unaccented syllables chucked in anywhere to make the mixture, not slab, but sloppy.

Miss Veley  
"A Japanese  
Fan"

For another example of the intimate and subtle, the almost uncanny, connection between metre and meaning—so different from that superadded charm which short-sighted people grant, not unfrequently grudging the grant itself—take Miss Margaret Veley's wonderful "Japanese Fan"<sup>2</sup>. Nothing could so suit the ironic

<sup>1</sup> It can be done, mathematically and constructively, by prefixing a syllable to the odd lines of the one—

[*And*] have I forgot, my only love, to love thee,  
and to the even of the other—

[*Tell*] of that new life when sin shall be no more

But of course the reshaping interferes with the beauty in the particular cases

<sup>2</sup> Originally in the *Cornhill Magazine* for September 1876. Reprinted in *A Marriage of Shadows and other Poems* [on the back simply *Poems*] (London, 1888). The whole book is worth reading, but "A Game of Piquet" is the chief other piece noticeable from our point of view.

gravity, the sardonic passion, of the piece as these soberly running trochees, with the sharp alternation of long and pulled-up-short lines. The suggestion is, of course, Browning's in "Love among the Ruins," but the modulation is different, owing to the shortening of the odd lines

Though to talk too much of Heaven  
Is not well,  
Though agreeable people never  
Mention Hell,  
Yet the woman who betrayed me,  
Whom I kissed,  
In that bygone summer taught me  
Both exist  
I was ardent, she was always  
Wisely cool,  
So my lady played the traitor—  
I, the fool  
Oh! your pardon! but remember,  
If you please,  
I'm translating this is only  
Japanese!

The citation of "Fata Morgana" above connects itself with that difficulty of this chapter with which I began. From the work of its author—a poet too commonly undervalued, though, by refusing to criticise himself, he provoked criticism from others—especially in the early *Wanderer* and the late *Marah*, I could, of course, draw endless prosodic examples, but none others that *need* be drawn for my special purpose. So, again, with his companion in the unwritten volumes of Horace Walpole's book, Lord De Tabley (Mr Leicester Warren), on whom, too late, after some (not unfit, but very few) had admired his work for nearly a lifetime, two volumes of excellent selections<sup>2</sup> drew something more like general attention

<sup>1</sup> It has been a great pleasure, and a small surprise, to me to see how some of those who have been good enough to read these volumes have picked up my little prosodic suggestions. It may amuse a few of them to consider just the difference which the shortening of the longer lines makes between "Love among the Ruins" and "A Japanese Fan." But it must be admitted that both hit the guileless but not guiltless head of the Reverend William Crowe rather hard, for his objection to this pull-up of verse.

<sup>2</sup> *Poems Dramatic and Lyrical*, First and Second Series (London, 1893 and 1895). Of "Owen Meredith" (Lord Lytton) there are two selections, one a small volume published during his lifetime in the "Canterbury Poets," and

I could illustrate this subject of later nineteenth-century prosody well and delightfully from him—if it had not been done already. I think his most original schemes prosodically, among scores poetically beautiful, are the "Serenade,"<sup>1</sup> with its quaint checks and returns, and the curious musical "Nuptial Song,"<sup>2</sup> which, by the way, shows a tendency towards assonance farther on.

Mr Henley

We have heard a good deal of "new prosodies" for some decades past, and I suppose those who believe (or would fain believe) in them would claim the late Mr Henley as a new prosodist. Yet in turning over the too few volumes (some of them his own gift) from *A Book of Verses* to the charming *Hawthorn and Lavender* and the much-extolled *Speed*, I find very little of anything that offers any real innovation. From almost the first he liked rhymelessness, but rhymelessness is about as new as the New Inn at Biddeford, which used (whether innocently or humorously I do not know, but I believe quite truly) to advertise itself as "the oldest in the town." He was fond of stanzas tailed into an actual monosyllable, as in

Shadows gleam on the downland  
Under the low spring sky,  
Shadow and gleam on my spirit—  
Why?

---

another made most carefully after his death (London, 1894) by his daughter, Lady Betty Balfour. This latter does not include the *Wanderer*, which had been previously republished in full, and in which the poem cited above will be found under its earlier title of "Astarte."

<sup>1</sup> Peace, where my love reposes,  
A shrine of slumber gray—  
Let sleep repair her roses  
Torn by the stress of day  
Sleep, till orient skies  
Misty peaks discover,  
Calling back thy lover,  
Where afar he lies—  
Thy lonely lover

<sup>2</sup> Sigh, heart ! and break not, rest, lark ! and wake not ;  
Diy I hear coming to draw my love away  
As mere-waves whisper and clouds grow crisper,  
Ah ! like a rose he will waken up with day

(It should be observed that "mere" is not mere "poetic diction," for Lord De Fabley was a Cheshire man and had a special right to use it.)

But though this may have been directly suggested to him by modern French poets, he need not have gone out of English for it. The "Speed" piece itself is essentially—I must yet again repeat, it may be by no means consciously—the motive of Kingsley's "Freya," crossed with Arnoldian suggestions, and carried out Whitmanically. A passage from it will show the danger of all these things. I print it as it stands in the book, and as prose, side by side, and I ask any one, on his honour and conscience, whether it does not go more naturally as prose?

Roads where the stalwart  
Soldier of Cæsar  
Put by his bread  
And his garlic, and girding  
His conquering sword  
To his unconquered thigh,  
Lay down in his armour,  
And went to his Gods  
By the way that he'd made

Roads where the stalwart soldier  
of Cæsar put by his bread  
and his garlic, and girding  
his conquering sword to his  
unconquered thigh, lay down  
in his armour, and went to  
his Gods by the way that he  
had made

But, on the whole, from *In Hospital* and *Life and Death* (*Echoes*)—echoes which started for some of us some five-and-thirty years ago—his poems simply avail themselves, with the originality which every poet should show, and no more, of the frank accommodation which the earlier nineteenth century had provided in the prosodic department.

Another still more recent loss, Mr John Davidson, <sup>John Davidson</sup> not only emitted prosodic heresies, but might have been expected to be heretical in practice. Henley, though he has been regarded as a rebel by those who did not know him, was never exactly rebellious, though he was Cyclopedically independent, but Davidson undoubtedly was, or would have liked to be. Accordingly, in a note to one of his volumes (*Holiday Poems*) he talked not over-wise things about rhyme, which he termed a "bedizened harlotry," a "property of decadence," and so forth (rude things, at which she doubtless smiled), betraying the secret of his petulance in the phrase (which is after a sense quite true) that the achievement of rhyme is something that rhyme



achieves, not the poet or the poetry But this was a mere anarchic splurt, and his actual work, from the early plays and the charming *Ballads and Songs* to the posthumous *Fleet Street and other Poems*, which wrote his own epitaph, shows regular though free prosody, and abundant rhyme His blank verse was an excellent variety of the Tennysonian, and as for rhyme, what does it matter what a man *says* about rhyme, when, at the beginning of his career and at the close of it, he writes two things like "Autumn" and "The Lutanist"?

Wanders weary, oh ! come hither,  
Where the green-leaved willows bend,  
Where the grasses never wither,  
Or the purling noises end—  
O'er the serned sedge late blowing  
Sue and float  
Golden flags, their shadows showing  
Deep as in a castle moat

The harvests of purple and gold  
Are garnered and ridden dead leaves  
To-morrow will carpet the wold  
And the arbours and sylvan caves,  
Dismantled, no welcome extend,  
The bowers and the sheltering eaves,  
Will witness to-morrow the end  
Of their stained, of their sumptuous leaves,  
While tempests apparel the wold  
In their cast off crimson and gold

It will be observed that this last, with its rondeau-like wheel, is quite an intricate embracement of the harlotry, quite a wallowing in the decadence of rhyme I only wish he had lived to continue yielding to temptation in this way

Francis  
Thompson.

The praise of the verse of a third dead maker of this particular time, Francis Thompson, will perhaps be rather spoilt, for immediate posterity, by the evident coterie influences which marked a part of it It is probable, indeed, that not a few of those who were most affected by *Sister Songs*, and the poems following, were really ignorant of the great debt he owed to his Caroline predecessors,

Crashaw especially, if not also of that to a remarkable writer of an older generation, who will, for reasons, follow him here, though he might almost have been treated in the last Book. But there is no doubt about the author of the "Hound of Heaven" retaining a high place among the second order of poets of his time. I do not, however, think that he requires very much notice prosodically, for almost all his most remarkable pieces are couched in that "modern Pindaric," which, though Tennyson had practically given it its passport in *Maud*, and most younger writers had taken it up more or less, presents nothing novel for us, and may be best illustrated under the name of Patmore himself.

A few general remarks on the curious contrast—one Coventry Patmore extending widely beyond our limits—between Mr Patmore's earlier and later career, may be made when we come to his precepts in the proper chapter of this Book. As far as his practice is concerned, it well-nigh leaps to the eyes prosodically. For twenty years, from *Poems* (1844) to *The Victories of Love* (1863), the centre of this work being *The Angel in the House* (1853), he almost entirely confined himself to easy fluent measures, especially an octosyllable, alternately or simply rhymed. He could sometimes manage, in this, very great phrase equipped worthily with cadence. I am glad to know that my own forty years' favourite—

Sick of night,  
The Alpine shepherd looks to the height,  
And does not see the day, 'tis true,  
But sees the rosy tops that do,

has secured suffrages worthier than mine<sup>1</sup>. Still, on the whole, he seemed to have deliberately courted the reproach

<sup>1</sup> Here is another

He that but once too nearly hears  
The music of forefended spheres,  
Is thenceforth lonely, and for all  
His days like one who treads the wall  
Of China, and on this hand sees  
Cities and their civilities,  
And on the other lions

But both of these are from *The Victories of Love*.

of slipshodness, if not even of namby-pamby, as if he had wished to serve himself heir to his father's old friend, Leigh Hunt, and improve the inheritance by crossing it with some of Tennyson's least good traits<sup>1</sup> But much later, in 1877, he issued *The Unknown Eros* (continuing it later still) in Pindaric of the most ambitious kind A reader of this, and of *The Angel in the House*, might be excused for thinking that the author, if he were really the author of both, must have prepared the first as an elaborate foil for the second And it is quite certain that no "scholar" (with the quotes) of the thirtieth century will ever for one moment allow identity of authorship (I have at least three theories, ready cut-and-dried, for the proper assignment of the different works) Not only is the metre "Pindaric," but the diction and thought-ordonnance are "metaphysical" in the highest degree—double epithets plentiful, sharp contrast of word-strings incessant The effect is often extremely fine, but there is constant sense of strain and tension Baudelaire, in one of his fits of humorous *pose* passing into incipient distraction, is said to have once suggested to a damsel that, before exchanging endearments, he should like to hang her up by the hair, whereat she very wisely *cohorruit et evasit* This kind of verse occasionally suggests eccentricities of the kind.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As in the once famous—

I, my own steward, took my rent,  
Three hundred pounds for half the year,  
Our witnesses the cook and groom,  
We signed the lease for seven years more

<sup>2</sup> For instance, though I have no great quarrel with the sentiment, I cannot wholly admire the style of this

In the year of the great Crime,  
When the false English nobles and their Jew,  
By God demented, slew  
The trust they stood twice pledged to keep from wrong

There is somewhat too much of Eracles' vein in it But who shall quarrel with *this*?

She, as a little breeze,  
Following still night,  
Ripples the spirit's cold deep seas  
Into delight

But in a while  
The immeasurable smile  
Is broke by fresher airs to flashes blent  
With darkling discontent,

Constructions, mostly very obvious, have been put on this fancy for Pindarics and for rhymelessness, and even for a certain tendency to neglect (or attempt to neglect) metre altogether, in favour of an irregularly "stressed" rhythm. But these things will be better discussed in the chapter on Prosodists and in the Conclusion. Meanwhile it only remains here to give a short account of an interesting prosodic episode which occurred about the beginning of the last quarter of the century, to refer briefly to some dead poets whom we cannot notice specifically, and to salute a few of the living who would be specifically noticed if they were not living—a further compliment which, in the circumstances, they will no doubt most cheerfully forego.

It was natural, and indeed inevitable, that the wide research among older verse, both English and foreign, which has been again and again noted, should draw attention to an interesting set of poetical forms which, French or Provençal in origin, with the natural Italian extension in some cases, had maintained a very strong hold on French taste from the thirteenth century to the early sixteenth, and had, in the late fourteenth and fifteenth, been actually English for a time, while in some cases (as in that of the triolet by Patrick Carey<sup>1</sup>) they had

The revival of  
the *ballade*  
and similar  
forms

And all the subtle zephyr huries gay,	<i>The fair and fleckless sands,</i>
And all the heaving ocean heaves one way,	And so the whole
T'ward the void skyline and an un-	Unfathomable and immense
guessed weal,	Triumphing tide comes at the last to
Until the vanward billows feel	reach
The agitating shallows and divine the goal,	And burst in wind kiss'd splendours
And to foam roll,	on the deafening beach—
And spread and stray,	Where forms of children in first
<i>And traverse wildly, like delighted hands,</i>	innocence
	Laugh and fling pebbles on the rain-
	bowed crest
	Of its untried unrest

He damaged the beauty of this by spelling "deafening" "deaf'ning," probably owing to some prosodic craze (how mere a craze other things in the piece show). But it is beautiful anyhow, and the italicised image—for the greedy rapidity of the thinning water and its foam-fingers—is quite delectable.

<sup>1</sup> *Trivial Poems and Triolets* (1651), reprinted by Scott in 1819, and by the present writer with other *Caroline Poets*, vol. II (Oxford, 1906).

been taken up, at least as playthings, by still later English poets

The central principle of all these forms is the favourite mediæval device of the refrain, used not casually, nor merely as a tip and catch to the stanza, but incorporated with it, and with the whole poem, on definite principles, thus standing to poetic, or at least prosodic, structure very much as the steel rods embodied in concrete do to the new fashion of architecture—that of Jeremiah as some say, Neo-Cyclopean as others call it

This principle is recognised by the name or names of one of the groups—*ronde*, *rondeau*, *rondel*, “roundel,” etc., which, though later specialised, obviously, in its original application, merely refers to the “coming round” of the refrain, while the repetition may, as obviously, extend to whole lines, to more than one line, or to part of a line worked in according to the taste and fancy of the poet. This repetition, again, may be always at the close, or at the beginning, or at both, or it may work its way through the stanzas in different places, like something settling through clear water at different levels

These things—pretty evidently derivations from the old simpler forms of song and carol in Southern and Northern French—seem to have begun to crystallise themselves about, as has been said, the thirteenth century, and very charming examples exist (under the name of an otherwise unknown writer, Jehannot de Lescurel) almost as early. But the definitely rhetorical turn of French poetry, during the fourteenth and fifteenth, stiffened them into vertebrate shapes with strict regulations—sometimes proceeding, as poetic gift died down and was replaced by rhetorical etiquette, to rather absurd complexities. Yet ballade, rondeau, triolet, villanelle, and the rest, up to the elaborate sestines and *chants royaux*, constantly served as admirably pliable instruments to real poets, like Charles d'Orléans and Villon, as well as later, till the Pléiade threw cold water on these now old-fashioned things in favour of what they thought more classical forms

Meanwhile English following had been by no means

non-existent, but neither very voluminous nor very felicitous. Gower wrote his *Ballades* in French, while Chaucer has left a certain number of English experiments, always interesting and in some cases attractive. But, as was noticed in the proper place, he himself had less of the *singing* power than of the other gifts of the poet, and these forms (the danger of which is a stiffness rhetorical in the bad sense) specially require lyrical quality—whence the excellence of the above-mentioned fifteenth-century Prince and Bohemian in them. The examples by, or attributed to, Lydgate and a few others, suffer from the generally prosaic tendency of their writers. And soon the hopeless inability of the English regular literary poet to tackle any metre at all made them of no account, while when Wyatt and Surrey restored harmony new fashions had come in from the country of their origin.

The French Romantic school, however, naturally fished them up again, and in its second generation especially, Théodore de Banville produced exceedingly charming examples which were certain, sooner or later, to found a school. With us Mr Swinburne's immense knowledge and universal prosodic faculty could not miss them, and he has some scattered examples of several forms with a considerable body of one—the "roundel," in which and elsewhere he took his own liberties, as he had a right to do. But the principal experiments on them were made by three living writers—Mr Andrew Lang, Mr Edmund Gosse, and Mr Austin Dobson, who were at one time largely followed,<sup>1</sup> Mr Henley being one of the chief followers.

<sup>1</sup> For a complete view of these "forms," in their specifications, see Mr Dobson's "Notes" on the subject, while there are no better examples than his "Essays in Old French Forms," included in *Old World Idylls* (1883). The style offered, of course, great opportunities for light and even burlesque use, which the writers mentioned, and others, did not neglect. Indeed the comic verse of the last division of the century generally and fully maintains the prosodic distinction which has been noted as usually marking that "arm of the service." The admirable "Nonsense" and other "Verses" of Edward Lear (to the best known form of which a meaningless and misleading topographical name has recently been given) and the varied Aristophanic wit of Calverley ("C S C"), in the earlier time, were excellently followed up, the chief successors being Mr H D Traill and Mr James Stephen ("J K S"). To

The thing was, of course, to some extent an instance of *engouement*, and, as *engouement* always does, it produced over-imitation and over-production on the one hand, a dead set against itself on the other, and in the end abrupt and rather unreasonable disuse. There is no doubt in the mind of the present writer that, with perhaps some licence<sup>1</sup> in the rules (for English is very impatient of mere arbitrarinesses), the chief measures, the ballade and rondeau, are genuine and valuable additions to English poetic form for many purposes, while for light use the triolet has few superiors. Such a use of the rondeau motive, for instance, as that in Mr Swinburne's super-exquisite

Kissing her hair I sate against her feet  
should appeal to every one

To doubt its music were to want an ear,  
To doubt its passion were to want a heart

While, like the triolet (which indeed is only a special form of it), this rondeau has admirable adaptableness for playful purposes. I admit that the most elaborate confections, such as the sestina and *chant royal*, seem to me rather too elaborate for English. You read them, when they are really fine, without much caring about the exact structure: they are simply grandiose specimens of the middle ode. But the ballade (though I do not know that you need always begin the *Envoi* with "Prince"—I would, like all rational religions and constitutions, allow "dispensations") is a very great measure indeed. With more space than the sonnet, with far more definite lyrical quality and greater scope for variation, it has the same power of vignetting and formally presenting a subject, its musical range is very wide, and its faculty of dealing with grave or gay things, with thought, or with feeling, or with object, is

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this quatlet no comic ply of verse was unknown, and their special gifts could never have found such perfect expression without the recovery of prosodic emancipation which has been chronicled here

<sup>1</sup> This licence must, of course, be judiciously used. The ballade, for instance, is less patient of irregular substitution than the triolet. But these things, like many other things prosodic, you cannot know till you try

extraordinary. Like all more or less artificial forms—like the sonnet itself—it, of course, offers dangerous temptations to the “copy of verses” But it is the business of the poet to resist these, and as for the poetaster, you will not keep him from sin if you knock off form altogether

Speaking prosodically, not of general poetry or literature, I do not know that Mr Stevenson's verse requires special notice. Much more might be given to that of Father Gerard Hopkins, if it were not that, as his friend Mr Bridges (who knew him long after I had lost sight of him, and with whose ideas on prosody he was much more in agreement than with mine) admits, he never got his notions into thorough writing-order. They belonged to the anti-foot and pro-stress division. But, even if it were not for old things and days, it would be unfair to criticise lines like

Some more  
dead poets,

I want the one rapture of an inspiration

—which you can, of course, scan, but where “one” seems to be thrust in out of pure mischief—or many others. He never published any, and it is quite clear that all were experiments. I do not know whether Mr Herbert E. Clarke, who, some thirty years ago, when I was reviewing practically all new verse, seemed to me the best of the newcomers, is alive or dead. I have seen nothing of his for years. But his *Songs in Exile* (1879) and *Stormdrift* (1882) showed very great faculty, within the bounds of regular prosody, but with no hamper or timidity. Thus, for instance, this is a very remarkable thing

Let my head lie quiet here upon your shoulder

Once, once more

Dead desires are round us, round us dead hopes moulder

All is o'er

Here let no one say, “Why! ‘Love among the Ruins’ and ‘A Japanese Fan’? What more?” A good deal more. For the lengthening of the long line does much, and the way in which the temptation to scan the short one anapæstically is averted, still more, so that you almost feel inclined to give it (as the first instance seems actually



to crave) the value of three monosyllabic feet, in order to put a stronger drag than ever on the run of the weary trochees in the first<sup>1</sup>

and some live  
ones.

But with others that cheering reflection returns which comforted the company, depressed by stories of Yellow Jack and the like "The Major *is* alive,"—there are still many of them—many majors—to salute, while those who are not saluted need not think themselves treated as minors. Mr Bridges first, of course, nor do I know how to be sufficiently grateful to him, either for giving me many years of satisfaction with his admirable practice in orthodox verse, or for sparing me the necessity of dealing, except lightly and indirectly, with what seem to me his less admirable principles and experiments in innovation. I have spoken of some others under "The Forms," and need only here reiterate the welcome which all good judges have given to Mr Dobson's craftsmanship in less exotic matters, and particularly to the manner in which, in the country of Prior, he has borne the succession of Præd. If it be true that the soul is a harmony—a dictum which seems to have disturbed Lucretius unnecessarily, for certainly his was harmonic enough—the dominant of Mr Kipling's soul is no doubt the anapæst, as is well seen of the "Ballad of East and West" and the fight of the three Sealers. And as for Mr W B Yeats, he is perhaps the capital example of an undoubted poet who has tried to wriggle himself, by fantastic will-worship of prosodic will-o'-the-wisps, into the unpoetical—and has failed. My friend Mr Omond has asked whether such a line as that in *The Shadowy Waters*—

The mountain of the gods, the unappeasable gods,

is metrical? I reply *securus*, "Why, certainly. Palpable Alexandrine", and you can generally stow away an Alexandrine anywhere. Prosody, like the excellent woman's children in George Eliot, "can do with an extr<sup>y</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some additions to this list have been suggested to me, and more have suggested themselves. But after trial, and more than one alteration of mind, I have regretfully decided to leave it as it is. For a more catalogue would be idle and provoking, and there is no room for anything more.

bit" There are few things more amusing to me than the way in which she quietly defeats the efforts, of the wilful ones who are hers, to escape her jurisdiction. As for the others, what does it matter whether *they* tend to plaster-cast grandiosity, or to Tennyson-and-water, or to mere eccentrics? But, this will do *Mortalis immortales salutat!*

## CHAPTER III

### THE LATER ENGLISH HEXAMETER AND THE DISCUSSIONS ON IT

Hexametrists between Daniel and the mid-eighteenth century—Goldsmith—Tucker and Herries—The German example and its followers—The "accentual" form—Coleridge—Southey his discussion of the matter—*The Vision of Judgment*—Between Southey and Longfellow—*Evangeline*—Clough *The Bothie*—His elegiacs, lyrics, etc.—Others—Cayley—Calverley—Kingsley and his remarks on *Andromeda*—*Andromeda* itself—Its base really anapestic—Tennyson—Arnold and others—Mr Swinburne—The last stage—Reversion to Spedding, etc.—Mr W J Stone—Mr Bridges' experiments

Hexametrists  
between  
Daniel and the  
mid-eighteenth  
century,

WE left the attempt to reproduce classical metres, and especially the hexameter and the elegiac couplet, at the point where it was temporarily extinguished by the utterly crushing criticism of Daniel, and (as far as dactylic verse was concerned) hardly less by the arguments of Campion himself. After this, for nearly two hundred years, the whole matter lay practically in abeyance. Sporadic attempts may be found noticed in Mr Omond's books, and elsewhere perhaps. Robert Chamberlain (a most different person from the author of *Pharonnida*) tried a half-score of hexameters in 1638. Wallis in his Grammar touches the subject by precept and example, and a *quidam* named Hockenhuill (1657) did as much as Chamberlain. Watts's Sapphics have been dealt with, I think Mr Omond is too hard on them. We do not, it would seem, know who wrote *An Introduction of the Ancient Greek and Latin Measures into British Poetry*, which appeared in 1737, and was probably a result of the same stirring of the

waters which produced Pemberton and Mainwaring, and started the abundant if futile prosodic writing of the later eighteenth century. This Anonym seems to have had no ear,<sup>1</sup> and his rules are quite interestingly heterogeneous. He believes in "quantity by position," but qualifies his belief by quite arbitrary licences,<sup>2</sup> extends the true dogma of the wide range of common quantity in English to the utterly damnable doctrine and position that *every* vowel is common, and while condemning wrenching of accent, wrenches it himself like a mountebank tooth-drawer.<sup>3</sup>

As yet, however, the sturdy good sense of the eighteenth Goldsmith century kept off much serious dealing with these evil spirits, while its rather deficient "curiosity" (in its own sense) as to experiments of fine art, barred the thing likewise. It was not till a quarter of a century after the Anonym that Oliver Goldsmith wrote his Essay<sup>4</sup> on "Versification," in which some have seen a remarkable thing. I hope I am not a Philistine, but I am bound to say that, putting quite aside the question of agreement or disagreement in opinion, I can see nothing in it beyond Oliver's well-known sciolism, his ingenious journalist instinct, and his faculty of redeeming everything that he did with pervading charm of style and an occasional corrective flash of genius. In this last respect the final paragraph of the Essay to a great extent does redeem the rest, though even here he goes wrong in supposing English verse to have a fixed number of syllables. He admits, however, a varied pause and cadence, as opposed

<sup>1</sup> He thought Sidney, in his hexameters, quite as musical as Chaucer, and considered

A Deity gave us this leisure, O Melibæus,

to be the kind of thing one could recommend to a friend

<sup>2</sup> A vowel is to be short before *cz*, because these consonants are near akin. Now there are few collocations which you can less easily take in your stride than this, unless you mutilate one or the other sound.

<sup>3</sup> "In Syriac Pastures." Having mislaid my notes on the book, I take examples from Mr. Omond's account.

<sup>4</sup> Essay XVIII. Cowper's Sapphics (noticed, like Watts's, before) were written much about the same time, but were never published till after his death.

to French, and his last sentence<sup>1</sup> by itself practically puts the pen through all the earlier part of the paper. But this begins with a repetition of the contemporary commonplace about verse owing its origin entirely to the music with which the first songs and hymns were accompanied, whereas it is just as likely to have been the other way. It continues with a little bit of snobbishness about grammar and prosody (which he is handling at the moment) being "the business of a schoolmaster rather than the accomplishment of a man of taste." It calls rhyme "a vile monotony," and returns to sanity with the statement that it is ridiculous to assert that modern poetry has no feet, but seems to apply that term only to collocations of syllables ending, or coinciding, with the words.

He illustrates so little (from English, indeed, not at all), and is so far from having cleared up his own mind on the subject, that a hasty and non-expert reader might take him as a rather oracular Moses or Columbus of prosody. For he says that "Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Pope, and all our poets abound with dactyls, spondees, trochees, anapæsts," which they use indiscriminately. But as he again and again repeats the limitation of *syllables*, it is clear that he only meant that whereas the ancients "were restricted to particular kinds of feet" in epic, pastoral, etc., the English poet can choose his metre, and that his words form combinations grouped in different ways.

The gist of the Essay is undoubtedly to recommend English hexameters, and he mentions Sidney's, but in so curious a fashion that one very much doubts whether he had ever read them, certainly quoting none and giving them no *direct* praise at all. He says he has "seen several later specimens of hexameters [it has been asked where?—probably the Anonym's] and Sapphics" [doubtless Watts's], and finds them "as melodious to the ear as the works of Virgil or Anacreon or Horace." It may seem illiberal, but I fear it is not unjust, to ask where Anacreon (*æ* the

<sup>1</sup> "The Greek and Latin languages are susceptible of a vast variety of cadences which the living languages will not admit."

pseudo-Anacreon) has left us either Sapphics or hexameters? Indeed this probably gives the key of the whole Essay, as one of the ingenious compositions, not quite unknown 150 years later, where the composer plays an extensive series of fancy-variations on a very small modicum of positively secured knowledge, or of definitely formed opinion

Ten years later Tucker and Herries (*v sup* vol II p 546) touched the matter. The former, like the Anonym, has a quasi-quantitative system, Herries is frankly accentual. Brains kept the former pretty straight in part,<sup>1</sup> while music led the latter almost wholly wrong. His Sapphics are fair "Needy Knife-grinder," that is to say, they quite alter the Greek and Latin *rhythm*, but his hexameters are purely atrocious,<sup>2</sup> this being partly due to the fact that, as he frankly acknowledges, he knew nothing of classical prosody, and so was going in the dark

Tucker and  
Herries

But I do not think that the definite turn to English hexameters which began towards the close of the century, and which has at intervals been continued for more than a century since, can be traced, in any appreciable degree, to these "sports" of earlier eighteenth-century study or attempt. The English hexameters, which William Taylor began, which Coleridge took up as a passing amusement, and which Southey, pretty clearly representing the same influence, greatly dared in the *Vision of Judgment* later, were undoubtedly due, in the first, and, to my thinking, by far the greater place, to disgust with the couplet, in the second to the German experiments in the actual hexametrical form. German is a language of almost wholly accentual prosody,<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, as we have seen, never—in *principle*—got out of the accentual slough, while Southey,

The German  
example and  
its followers

<sup>1</sup> But only in part, for I cannot accept

A spirit internal penetrates through earth and ocean

as anything at all but prose with a needless inversion

<sup>2</sup> Fancy "Thee, lovely partner, thee," being taken on *any* principles as = three English spondees!

<sup>3</sup> If this ("stress" being substituted for "accent" if any one pleases) had been more generally remembered, it would have been better

as almost everything in his *Preface* shows, and as I shall hope shortly to expound from it, knew perfectly well the limitations of possibility in his attempt, though he, I think unwisely, dared them. Now the hexameters of this period have practically governed the various further revivals of the experiment since, either by the way of imitation or by that of revolt. Longfellow, Clough in part, Kingsley in the one Pyrrhic victory of the form, and others, have directly followed Southey and Coleridge, while the so-called or so-self-calling "quantitativists,"<sup>1</sup> who seem to me to violate every principle of English quantity and English verse at once, from Cayley to the late Mr. Stone, and "some not late," have usually taken this type as something from which to be different. A very few persons, of whom Tennyson is the most considerable instance,<sup>2</sup> have endeavoured to combine, and in some degree succeeded in combining, the two schemes.

The "accentual ' form

Now I dislike and disallow the accentual hexameter, welcoming it only when it is a half-unconscious *transfuga*, and ceases to be dactylic and hexametrical at all, becoming a plain English five-foot anapaestic, with anacrusis and hypercatalexis, as in the ever-delightful verse of *Andromeda*.<sup>3</sup> But I am quite unable to agree with Mr. Omond, and others of various sects, that it is "*in no sense*" an equivalent of the ancient hexameter. Whether it is an equivalent of that hexameter as it sounded to Pericles or to Cicero I cannot say, because, as I have had once or twice regretfully to remark, I am profoundly convinced, after considering everything that has been advanced by modern "reformers," that we do not in the least know what that sound was. But I know what the sound *to me* of the average Latin hexameter—the Virgil

<sup>1</sup> How they get "quantitative" I have never known, or been able to find out, on either Latin or English principles.

<sup>2</sup> Considerable in position. Lancelot Shadwell (*v. inf.*) is the most considerable in quantity of the other kind.

<sup>3</sup> On the verse of Mr. Swinburne, who consciously wrote it thus, *v. inf.* It may perhaps be barely desirable to observe that I use the term "accentual" as the accepted opposite to "quantitative." I think mere accent as inadequate for the scansion of Mr. Swinburne's and of Kingsley's verses of this kind as of any other.

type—is, and I acknowledge that (with differences, advantages, and drawbacks to be noticed presently in individual cases) the average English accentual kind seems to me to be in *form*<sup>1</sup> a fairly adequate equivalent. Only, this equivalent is in totally wrong *material*—material which rings false, at every beat and echo, when the whole line, and several lines, are taken together. Of the English quantitative hexameter we may speak later. I shall only say here that it seems to me not merely not to be an equivalent of the ancient hexameter in any way, but to be the equivalent of nothing at all except the most floundering and unrhythmical doggerel. But we must trace the history of both kinds, in our usual way, before summing up in relation to either and both of them.

Coleridge, here as elsewhere, has a Puckish or Lepre- Coleridge  
chaunish character about him, which is somewhat provoking. Yet it is something of a document that his practice in these things was evidently to him as much a mere “experiment in metre” as those extremely interesting fragments,<sup>2</sup> undated, which make one rather wonder whether he was quite so sure that Mr Tennyson was “out” as a metrist. Nor should we neglect the avowedly burlesque Sapphics which he wrote for young Gillman, in clear reminiscence of the “Knife-grinder” itself, and the “weary way-wanderer” that it wickedly worried. His hendecasyllables are very beautiful if not rigidly exact,<sup>3</sup> but then the hendecasyllable has nothing in it at all alien from the true principles of English verse, and is often hardly distinguishable from a rather freely equivalenced and redundanted heroic. I see no

<sup>1</sup> That is to say, I recognise, in the “accentual” English form, an attempt to get four dactyls or spondees, one dactyl, and one spondee into a line, and I admit that, separately considered, the feet, at least sometimes, sound like what they aim at.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, ed Dykes Campbell, p. 470.

<sup>3</sup> He took the liberty (strictly right in *English* prosody) of beginning with a dactyl instead of a spondee, trochee, or iamb. But those who think scorn of him for doing so should remember that there are such readings in Catullus himself as

*Est vehe|mens dea, laedere hanc caveto,*

though of course I know that *vehemens* is often dissyllabic in value.



*particular* objection, though my general one remains unaltered, to his well-known specimen hexameters and elegiacs, albeit, as he specifically called the latter "*Ovidian*," he should certainly have respected that poet's fancy for the dissyllabic ending. But it is also quite clear from his own description of it, in the exemplifying epistle to the Wordsworths, as

a hop, and a trot, and a gallop,

that it was not a pure dactylic-spondaic measure that was in his ears, but an anapæstic one with substitution. This does "hop" and "trot" and "gallop" at pleasure: the dactylic hexameter never "hops," and does not exactly gallop, it chiefly trots and canters. But Coleridge, I am sure, was never wholly serious in this matter. He, like everybody else, was sick of the stock couplet, he liked German, he liked the classics—that was about the whole of it. He never used the form on any large scale, and he never defended or even discussed it at any great length.

Southey his  
discussion of  
the matter

On the other hand, Southey, when, much later, he took up the measure for serious use, treated the objections to his attempt quite frankly. He has, I think, unknowingly glanced at—though his expression is quite wrong—the truth about the general failure, while he has, perhaps also unknowingly, settled the hash of quantitative hexametrism, in the sentence, "If it is difficult to reconcile the public to a new tune in verse, it is plainly impossible to reconcile them to a new pronunciation." With the self-styled quantitative hexameter you must either have a new pronunciation, or a mere ruinous and *arrhythmic* heap of words.

With the accentual it is at least not so, but Southey himself saw that it is exposed to other dangers, though his formulation of them is, or seems to me, a mistake. It is not so much a new *tune* as a new *mode* that it introduces, and to some of us that new mode is unconquerably inharmonious, unless differentiated in the way I have pointed out. He says that he has "substituted the trochee for the spondee, a necessary alteration, because

the whole vocabulary of the language does not afford a native spondee." I have already pointed out that this is a mistake. But the fact is that it would matter nothing if it were not. You do not necessarily—if you are wise you do not usually—make single foot of single word.<sup>1</sup> So again, when he says that he has "taken the licence of not beginning every line with a long syllable" As a matter of fact he has not taken this, and he could not take it without destroying the measure. He revives the curious old bugbear of the redundancy of monosyllables, and the paucity of polysyllables in English. That this is, to say the least, exaggerated, I am sure. The persistence of the exaggeration may be thought to give some support to it. But the language that gave us, some three hundred years ago—

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
and some thirty years ago—

How passionately and irretrievably,  
can surely defend itself against the charge.

I believe that Southey, in his observations about the trochee, has stumbled upon—though he has also stumbled over, and gone on without perceiving it—the truth of the whole matter as far as it will go in our direction. We *have* dactyls as such in English—plenty of them isolated, and innumerable numbers of them ready to be combined. But by themselves, or with most other feet, they, in English, "won't do", and they insist on changing themselves into fresh combinations of anapaestic character. There is one exception as far as feet go, and that is the trochee. You *can* make combinations of dactyl and trochee in English—one of the best known, and much the best, being the very pretty use of the two in Kingsley's "Longbeard's Saga," which is as graceful as possible, though very slightly exotic. The dactyl also, used sparingly, takes the place for substitution, in regular

<sup>1</sup> Even Guest never denied that two accented (i.e. "long") syllables might come together at the end of one word and the beginning of another, though his system required a pause between them.

trochaic measures, of the anapæst in iambic But dactyl and spondee will not combine in English gracefully · you have only to compare the symbols *tumtity tumtum* and *tumtity tumti* to see, or rather hear, the difference

*Yet you cannot substitute trochee for spondee, and yet keep the hexameter effect* Southey may talk about trochees as much as he likes, but any one who will read any example taken from him will find that they have to be *spondaised* to get into the verse at all Take his very first line in the *Vision*

'Twas at that sober hour when the light of day is receding

Now if you take them *in themselves*—a practice responsible for many errors in prosody—"sober" and "light of" are unexceptionable trochees enough. But if you endeavour to *value* them as such in the line, with the resultant consecutive swing, you will find that you have got three almost unconnected syzygies<sup>1</sup> which make rocking-horse curtseys and mocking mouths at each other, while they ruin the run of the verse as a hexameter proper You must "bear up" the trochee into a spondee before you get the effect at all, though I do not say that even then you get it very well For then you encounter another difficulty You will not rid yourself of the separate effect unless you can fix a strong purchase on the cæsura-syllables An English hexameter, to be good even of its bad kind, wants, unless it gives up the unequal conflict and becomes frankly anapæstic, to run in something like halves, to combine the old middle crease with the continuous arrangement of the classical verse, which naturally cannot always be done In default you get slippery, slovenly things that tickle the vulgar ear with a sort of caressing novelty, or jolting gangs of accent that seem to be running a sort of donkey-race of cacophony. You can *only* escape by the anapæstic door Coleridge, to return to him for a minute, in his own early experiments knew, and could not but know, that his own verses were "false metric", in fact he affirmed it with his usual

<sup>1</sup> 'Twas at that sober || hour when the light of || day is receding

coolness in one place, and might have done so much oftener. When he is good he *is* anapæstic<sup>1</sup>

Southey's own practice has the adequacy, within limits, which is the characteristic of all his poetical work, and which here generally removes the metre, despite its inherent defects, from the worst possibilities of those defects. The third line of the *Vision*—

*The Vision of Judgment*

Fade like the hopes of youth, till the beauty of earth is departed,  
is about as good average quality of this form as you will find, and it has the proper run. On the other hand—

Lighten their heads in the silent sky from far Glaramara

has a double fault, splitting itself up as above described, and (with or without compensation in "fai" according to taste) shortening the first syllable of the beautiful mountain name. But he seldom or never falls into the rickets and the slip-slop which are the great curses of the style, and his use of pause in the verse, and stop or non-stop at the end, of epanaphora and such-like devices to make a verse-period, and of other things, is quite craftsmanlike. Sometimes, indeed, he takes undue licences. I cannot on any terms away with "conkror" for "conqueror" in the last foot. But such things are rare, and if any impartial judge of verse, who has hitherto been prevented from reading the poem by Byron's ridicule, dismisses that prejudice, he will find it quite worth reading, though, if he goes so far with me, he will probably go farther and wish that it had been in any other metre.

Naturally, and quite independently of personal and political rancour, the thing attracted much criticism. We have already noticed (because they deal more with the general than with the special side of the question) that of Tillbrook (which was nearly the earliest, the most well-informed, and the least one-sided), and that of the

Between  
Southey and  
Longfellow

<sup>1</sup> I need only call interim attention to the importance, in this special connection, of the fallacious opinion that whether you scan by dactyl or anapæst, by iamb or trochee, it is "all the same." There is no end to the mischief which this delusion, natural as it is on the accentual system, has done. We shall deal with it faithfully later.

*Edinburgh Review*, with its Pharaonic hardening of heart I do not know whether Frere (*v. sup* p 166) was the first to imagine that you can have an extra syllable at the beginning of an English hexameter, a notion quite destructive of any lingering resemblance to the ancient metre, but possibly connected with the true view of it as English verse<sup>1</sup> This notion was exaggerated by the also previously-mentioned Blundell But the matter, though evidently occupying not a few minds, still remained mostly in abeyance till the forties In 1841 Longfellow published his hexametrical translation of Tegnér's *Children of the Lord's Supper*, following it up six years later with *Evangeline*, the poem which gave it its first hold on the general, and twelve years later still with *Miles Standish* But between his first and his main experiment attention, both in practice and discussion, grew quite lively in England Two translations of the *Iliad* appeared, with reviews of them by distinguished hands, while a year after *Evangeline* there came out the other most popular attempt in the kind, Clough's *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (its earlier title does not matter prosodically).

*Evangeline.*

Think what we may of *Evangeline* (for we had better confine ourselves to the central example<sup>2</sup>) there is one thing to be said about it which cannot be said of any but a few books—that after some fifty years of attempts of one kind or another, after three hundred since the first attempts were made, it achieved distinct popular success for a particular and peculiar scheme of metrical arrangement One may hold popular taste cheap enough—it could hardly be dropped low enough for me, if it were put up for sale at Dutch auction But to “get your constitution to march” has long been recognised by the wise as something Longfellow did get his constitution to march in the opinion of a great many people, it has marched

<sup>1</sup> Compare Coleridge's dodecasyllabic hendecasyllable just noticed

<sup>2</sup> As one might expect, *The Children* has a little more of novice work (closed “Th” at the beginning, etc.), and *Miles* is a little more confident and practised But perhaps the very expectation deceives, and there is really little difference

in that opinion for more than sixty years, and, *valeat quantum*, the feat must be allowed for

Having allowed for it, without tongue in cheek, let us see what the achievement is worth, from a point of view which is not popular, or from several points of view that are not. There are some technical criticisms of it, possible and valid in a certain sense, on which I should not myself be inclined to lay very much stress. The old bugbear of the scarcity of spondees is certainly not to be simply waved away. I have admitted "commonness" in English to the greatest possible extent. But it can scarcely be denied that in such a line as

That the dying heard it and started up from their pillows,

"That the" can hardly be forced into anything but a trochee, and "dying" and "started" are naturally and in their places nothing else. Accentual system, *ictus* system, inherent-long-vowel-quantity system, any others you like to call upon,—they can hardly, even by clubbing their forces and eking out the thing by a jot here and a tittle there, get long syllables out of "the" and "-ing" and "-ed" in *these places*. The consequence is that the line fails to satisfy even the most tolerant and unpedantic requirements of a classical hexameter. Almost the only lines which *will* pass this muster are wholly or mainly dactylic ones, like<sup>1</sup>

✓| Crown us with asphodel flowers that are wet with the dews of  
nepen<sup>1</sup>the,

and it is needless to say that a great preponderance of these differentiates the thing at once from either Greek or (still more) Latin verse, where the spondee has to play its part to get the full character of the measure.

But, it may be said, these are not Greek or Latin verses, they are English. Well and good. The objection could not be brought to a court more willing to receive it. Are they *good* English verses? No, they are not, save with anapaestic "upsetting," which will not always

<sup>1</sup> Objection to the quantity of "nepenthe" I think pedantic, the difference of long and short *e* in English being less than that attached to any other vowel. And note that this line itself craves the anapaest.

suffice To begin with, the preponderant dactyl has been admitted, by the very defenders of classical verse itself, to be rarely, if ever, good in our language This objection may be partly met by adopting anapæstic scansion, which, as we shall see, makes glorious verse of true English quality in Kingsley's *Andromeda* But even with this (which, let it be remembered, "gives the metre away" on its own showing) there is a weakness in Longfellow's fingering which does not suit the ring of the anapæst—a much more nervous, more vigorous, and stouter foot than its counterpart, and one which wants its long syllables not only long but strong On the other hand, this scansion makes utter havoc of the trochaicised lines Try it on the above-cited

That the dying heard it and started up from their pillows

The effect is simply disastrous The anacrusis thrusts itself forward as part of a substantive foot—"That̃ thẽ dý̃-"  
and the whole scansion is dislocated Whichever flag, therefore, it hoists, it must be condemned

It is thus, except in some chance shots, where the poet gets the better of his medium, an ill thing and an ugly, considered from any technical or artistic point of view, while it has (*Miles Standish* brings out this fault even more than *Evangeline*) a peculiar rickety slipshodness which is sometimes very trying At the same time, its popularity is not to be merely put aside with the cheap paradox that the bad is generally the popular It is not, I think, deniable that, like some other things bad, ugly, and slovenly in themselves (such as an old shoe), it has its uses and conveniences More people, among readers in Longfellow's day, than at present had a certain, but not a scholarly, familiarity with the measure, and liked it in a confused way as connecting itself with their youth Its marked singsong is a quality which undoubtedly appeals more to untrained ears than the complicated harmony of the most beautiful lyric stanzas, or the subtle and elusive music of blank verse But there is something more Most of its qualities, and not a few

of its defects, make it positively a better medium for narrative than more genuine and graceful forms of English verse. Its great content is one of its merits for this purpose. There is no doubt that the ordinary line acts as a restraint in narration, unless you can get it into the slipping slide of the Gower - Keats - Morris octosyllable, or of the seventeenth-century-Keats enjambed heroic, where the line-ends ring but do not cause any break. In one sense, no doubt, there is a considerable break at the end of each hexameter line, but, from the abnormality of the rhythm in English, it is not a *poetically* felt break, and is much more like the usual intervals for breath in prose reading. In fact English prose has by no means, from Chaucer's *Boethius*<sup>1</sup> downwards through the numerous passages in the English Bible, shown any objection to "dropping into hexameter." Yet again, if you try (I have tried in many places) you will find not the slightest difficulty in reading line after line, and even batch after batch, *as* prose. Who that did not know it would necessarily take

Ah<sup>1</sup> on her spirit within a deeper shadow had fallen

for verse? He would not, without context and verse arrangement, naturally read "fallèn", and with "fall'n" the whole clause is good and pure prose. I suspect that in the same way—

There stood the wheaten loaf and honey fragrant with wild flowers,  
there stood the tankard of ale and cheese fresh brought from  
the dairy, and at head of board the great arm-chair of the  
farmer,

would either escape notice altogether, or be detected only by the repetition of "there stood" and the form "of the farmer" instead of "the farmer's," both of which *might* be prose. I would undertake to read it as it is without any straining, so as to give no impression of verse whatever—the correspondences are so easily masked, and the verse-bases so easily grouped into prose clauses. Now with real, even blank-verse this is almost impossible

<sup>1</sup> *V. sup.* i p 8



Clough  
*The Bothie*

The observations which I have made on Longfellow's hexameters apply, as it seems to me, in increasing measure to those of Clough, both the specially called "accentual" ones and the others. Some remarks which I have already given on the writer<sup>1</sup> may be appealed to, to show that I am not of those who think him "a bad poet", and though I freely confess that the sentiments of the *Bothie* bore me, and that its narrative leaves me quite uninterested, I think the whole tenor of this History will justify me from the charge of being unduly influenced by the subject in my judgment of the form. For mere picturesque effect that form is of course sometimes happy enough, especially in the spondaic (or rather trochaic<sup>2</sup>) endings. It is good school fun, of course (and good school fun is a very good thing), to make

The Laws of  
 Architectural Beauty in Application to Women

into the end of one hexameter and the whole of another. Not the slightest violence is done to the actual prose title, but then it is to be feared it is because the verse itself is actually prose.

'Twas not in nature, the piper averred, there should not be kissing (which, if I remember rightly, Mr Lang once still further improved by quoting from memory—

It was not in nature that there should not be kissing)—

is capital fun again, because, especially in the last form, we contrast it with the elegance of Virgil and the magnificence of Lucretius. But it is really all prose—crumpled up as you crumple up a face, real or india-rubber, in fun, by taking it between your two hands and squeezing it. Only a few inversions and tricks, *metri gratia*, save the famous passage of the cascade-pool from being prose—quite beautiful prose of the modern descriptive type, but prose.

His elegiacs,  
 lyrics, etc

His elegiacs are (as they nearly always are) worse,

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* p 264

<sup>2</sup> Spothey had introduced these very sparingly, Longfellow often; Clough lavished them.

and when he gets between quantity and accent, and tries to do a sort of act on two horses, specially so. What English ear that is unafflicted with disease wants such a line as

Orbs in a dark umbrayge, luminous and ready-aunt,

or

They of Ä-mör musing rest in a leafy cä-vern?

Torture—at least judicial torture of the old kind—is unfashionable in modern days, though paradoxers have defended it as a means to an end. But why strappado your mother-tongue in order to made hideous and ludicrous things of this kind? There is no such outrage perhaps, and there is a certain quaintness and cleverness, in making Horace masquerade thus—

He who with pure dew laveth of Castaly  
His flowing locks, who holdeth of Lycia  
The oak forest and wood that bore him,  
Delos' and Patara's own Apollo,

though it may be observed that, in English, it will be "Deloses," and so spoil the metre. But putting this aside, *what is the good of it?* It is not pretty. "Of Castaly" is in a violently wrong place, and you have, after all, to shove in tags, stopgaps, *chevilles*, like "own." Again—

Mr Claude, you know, is behaving a great deal better

It would be not bad fun to write that once in a letter but as you can do it as fast as you write mere prose stuff—really the purest prose—why should you do it at all?

He tried various experiments in "classical" verse, including Alcaics, and *The Letters of Parepidemus*<sup>1</sup> (1853) discuss the subject with a tendency towards quantitative scansion. But, like nearly everybody else (in a page or two I hope to make good this apparently arrogant phrase), he seems to me never to have cleared up his mind on the subject. I do not know a better test word in the case than "odoriferous," which, as Mr Omond has noted,

<sup>1</sup> The apparently pedantic title merely expresses the fact that he was writing as a "passing stranger" in America for an American magazine.

Clough at one time scanned *odoriferous*, and at another *odoriferous*. If you are to have English classical metres at all, there is no doubt that the latter is the only possible scansion, but the word is one which I think a good English poet would avoid in any metre. If I were such, or if I were a poet at all, I should avoid it *tanquam scopulum*, because with ordinary pronunciation you cannot get way enough on the "-rif-," and with classicised you cannot get enough on the "-ous." I tolerate Clough because he is a Helot, and I love Helots. More liquor to them! in order that they may be (to put notes into the Article descriptive of the Apocrypha) "examples of *bad* life and instructions of manners *to be avoided*."

Others

This Helotry was rife in the decades preceding and following the middle of the century, and Mr Omond's books will supply anybody who cares to rummage the subject with full references. In various ways Lancelot Shadwell, whose work has been glanced at, John Oxenford, dramatic critic; James Spedding,<sup>1</sup> good man, and friend of better, Professor Robinson Ellis, still one of the greatest of our classical scholars, Whewell, chief of those who seem to know, Lockhart, never to be mentioned by me without honour, F W Newman, instance of a genius foiled and "failed" by crankery, and instance also that if, as Miss Rossetti says, "There is no friend like a sister," there surely is no enemy—at least to one's fame—like a brother, Munro, to be put in the opposite scale to Mr Ellis, that we may hold the balance true—these are names always to be saluted, though with guns varying in number. I shall take, however, for discussion in detail two preceptists, Cayley and Calverley, and two poets, Kingsley and Tennyson, as representative of this middle division.

Cayley

Charles Bagot Cayley (1823-1883) (not to be confused with his elder brother, the famous mathematician, Arthur

<sup>1</sup> Spedding seems really to have been the father of the notion of quantity combating accent. As this, though to some extent taken up by Clough, has been largely developed by Mr Stone and Mr Bridges, I shall postpone discussion of him till I come to these.

Cayley) must have been a remarkable person, and his relations with literature were, in a more exalted sense than Sam Weller's with London, "extensive and peculiar." He was one of those men of unquestioned literary power who prefer translation to original work, and he dealt in it with both Greek (*Homer* (1877) and *Æschylus* (1867)) and Italian (*Dante* (1851) and *Petrarch* (1879)). Who copes with great ones is not always great, but at any rate he attempts greatness. And Cayley was not merely a practitioner. In a paper, "Remarks and Experiments in English Hexameters," which appeared in the *Philological Society's Transactions* (1861), and in the Preface to his *Æschylus*,<sup>1</sup> he dealt preceptively with the matter, seems to have based himself on Spedding to some extent, and endeavoured once more the hopeless task of giving "rules"<sup>2</sup> for quantity in English. But his most important position in the subject is perhaps due to the opening distich in the short verse-introduction to his *Homer*—

Dōns, ūndergrādūates, ĕssāyists, ānd pūblic, Ī āsk yōu,  
Are these "hexameters" true-timed, or Klopstockish uproar?

and especially to the first of them

In fact this line, which has been not infrequently quoted, and which is a challenge in terms, seems to me as good a text or *casus*, as any other from Spedding to Stone, for beating up the quarters of the English Quantity-mongers. I have myself been blamed for using the word "Quantity" without distinct reference to time, though

<sup>1</sup> I cannot resist a quotation which shows this really brilliant writer's ignorance of the subject which he was treating. He talks of "the alliterative doggerel to which our [and by *our* he means inclusively *Chaucer's*] countrymen had been accustomed *from the time of the Anglo-Saxon Kings*." That there are the harest traces of what "our countrymen" were "accustomed to from the time of the Anglo-Saxon Kings" to 1200, and that these traces are distinctly *metrified*, Mr. Cayley evidently did not know, that, except in Layamon partially, there is no trace of any "alliterative doggerel" till a period probably posterior, and certainly not much anterior, to that of Chaucer's birth, he knew still less. Now too much stress may be laid on mere learning, but it might perhaps be better to know *something* of the history of the matter of which you are talking.

<sup>2</sup> Vowel before vowel short, vowel before doubled consonant short, vowel before two consonants long, etc., as illustrated in the scanned line above.

for my own part I never knew that *quantus* had temporal reference only, and I have given a strict definition of my own use. These other learned persons appear to me to use the word with no *English* sense at all. On what possible interpretation of the word "long" can you apply it to the second and fifth syllables of the English word "undergraduate"? By a fortunate chance there is here unusually little confusion possible on the accentual score. Fanatics of "single accent" and fanatics of "non-contact" in accent might raise side-battles, but, for my part, I should say that, by a correct speaker, "undergrad-" would be accented pretty equally on all three syllables, though the sharper sound of the *a* in "-grad-" might seem to carry a special pseudo-accent with it, and perhaps the bulky "stodgy" sound of *u* in "und-" another. So far, you see, I approach Cayley—at least to the (in my case quite immaterial) extent of not regarding "er" as in this case necessarily and *insalvably* "short". But on what *quantitative* principle can you, in *English*, make it definitely "long"? Accent—prominent accent—is here hopelessly against you. To pronounce "undergraduate" is to speak a language that is not English. But you do not mind that—your principle is not to mind it? Very well. Let us pass to another possible ground of quantity. Can you make the actual vowel *e* long in this syllable? Can you pronounce the thing as "un-dear-graduayte"? Clearly you cannot, and would never think of doing so, save to fight a prize. There remains only the old exploded absurdity of "quantity by position". Now this has always been a capital instance of the supreme misfortune of writing about a subject without knowing its facts. That "position" made a vowel, under certain circumstances and with certain limitations, long in Latin, can be no more reason why it should make that vowel long in English than the existence of the words "hang-hog" in English can justify them as Latin for "bacon". The wiser Elizabethans, by mother-wit, if not always by conclusive argument, saw this. But the fact is—and Orm knew it,

though Cayley did not, and though the persons who spell "traveller" "traveler" do not—that doubled consonants have rather a tendency to *shorten*<sup>1</sup> vowel-sounds (not syllables) in English, and single ones to lengthen them—unless the collocation is dislocated, and the two or more consonants are pronounced with distinct separation and yet with a throw-back to the antecedent vowel<sup>2</sup> This they are not here, "-ergr-" can find no buttress in the "-gr-," and remains a thinnish sound, conspicuously *shorter* than "-und-" and "-grad-"

But the case of "-āte-" is even worse than that of "-crg-," though pronouncing insistence on it does not make the word quite so ridiculous I do not propose or defend the vulgar "undergraduate" as "Jesuit" I think a correct pronouncer will always keep the *a* But he will keep it in a state of *nuance*, will subject it to *kenosis* of its length—in short, will bring it near to "*et*," with a shade of value for the final *e* This deprives it of all possibility of any but fictitious length in English, and there is no reason and no excuse for conferring any upon it, except the absurd one that in another language, another word, of different termination and proportion, from which it happens to be derived, has the *a* long<sup>1</sup>

The whole of this *History* will, I hope, justify me from the charge of being either ignorant of classical prosody, or disdainful of it, or unwilling to use its help, its example, its terminology, so far as is safe in English I doubt very much whether, except by some special and divine aid of personal genius, any man ever mastered English prosody, on the theoretical side, who had not long marked time, and learnt drill, and practised gymnastics, in Greek and Latin But to transfer, not merely schematic and abstract terms and forms, which, like those of logic and

<sup>1</sup> The "quantitivist" tendency to confine this to a double of the *same* consonant, and enforce it there, has no ground of fact or reason whatever

"Banner," "follow," and a hundred others are as long as you like, and cannot be shortened properly

<sup>2</sup> Here I shall come under my friend Mr Omond's excommunication, but I hope he will omit the candle, or at any rate not use it to light the fire round a subsequent stake

mathematics, are applicable to any matter, but principles affecting matter itself, from one language to another, in the way proposed by the class of scholars with whom I am dealing, seems to me to be frankly monstrous, and so to be in a certain sense justified of the monstrosities it produces. Regarded from no point of view can such a verse as

Dons, undergraduates, essayists, and public, I ask you,

or any other of its preposterous kind, be regarded as genuine English verse. And they can only be got into Anglo-Greek or Anglo-Latin versification by what Petronius might call, in a new sense, a "fabulous torment"—a fantastic strappado of fictions, which give a mock appearance of classical metre to a congeries of essentially non-classical sounds. Renaissance "versing" had various excuses—the fresh reverence for the classics, the store of precedent English verse—positively not rich and thought poorer than it was—the generous fancy for experiment, and other things. The new attempts of the latest eighteenth century had some excuses of the same kind. The general ignorance of prosody prevented people from discovering that the so-called "accentual" hexameter—that is to say, the only hexameter possible in English verse-substance—is, when it is good verse, not a classical hexameter at all, but a five-anapaest line with anaeris and hypercatalexis. But this "quantitative" hexameter has no excuse at all. It is a deliberate liturgy of Antiphrasis—an attempt to do something in alien material, and with improper implements. Good-nature has suggested that perhaps some poet, at some lucky hour, will make poetry in this way. I am afraid that this is a misuse of history and analogy—an instance of the fallacy that, because Columbus discovered America, somebody will some day square the circle. I hope that, if this book has done anything, it has shown that the progress of English prosody has been strictly normal and natural—that it has developed the germs provided by, on the lines originally indicated in, the blend of Teutonic-Romance

matter and form constituted in the early Middle Ages. This would not be a natural progress, and it would not be a normal development. Had it been so, it would indeed have been strange if Spenser and Sidney, if Southey and Coleridge, if all the nineteenth-century experimenters from Longfellow to Mr Bridges, had not, in one case at least, found the way. Strangest of all would it be if such a metrical *tregetour* as Tennyson, in producing something which is technically almost faultless, had, as he actually has, produced at the same time something distinctly non-natural. The circle is not the square, and never will be<sup>1</sup>. It seems, therefore, rather idle to devote particular attention to all the various attempts to square it. They can be traced to sources as various: sheer ignorance of history, reinforcing lack of ear, in some cases, a respectable reverence for antiquity, and yearning to reproduce "the old familiar faces" of Homeric, Virgilian, Horatian versification in others, a more respectable desire to enrich the national treasury in others yet, an aspiration, most respectable of all, after experiment, after something not yet achieved, after the impossible. But they are all fore-doomed to failure, and they have all undergone their doom.

I have gone far from Cayley. To round the matter back to him, it may be observed that, in his *Æschylus* Preface, he has so little ear as to couple Kingsley with Longfellow, and that in the text<sup>2</sup> he writes—

Here is the Scythian pathless and forlorn *desert*

Now if any one will read the last two words scanningly he will recognise that he has sometimes met the object, but a "forlorn des[s]ert" is not peculiarly Scythian, while "a forlorn *desèrt*," though a good metaphysical phrase, and a real criticism of life, will not suit the context.

I am not sure that, from a slightly different point of Calverley view, the most important contribution to the quantity-accent dispute, in its special bearing on the question of classical metres in English, is not that of the ever-to-be

<sup>1</sup> For the theory of accentual and quantitative *combat* see note above on Spedding (p. 410) and below (pp. 425-429).

<sup>2</sup> "Quantitative" *iambics*, of course, and *not* *scazons*.



regretted<sup>6</sup> author of *Fly-Leaves*, in the paper (1868) on *Metrical Translation*, which is reprinted in his *Remains*, p. 173 "C S C" was, in the first place, an admirable classical scholar, and he was, in the second, a master of English metre<sup>1</sup> I do not agree with his views, but I see how they arose He, like Spedding, Cayley, and others, takes the point that classical verse was not intended to be read as it scans *But he himself had been taught to read not scanningly*—that is to say, he had been accustomed to say to himself, *arma virumque cayno* and *Mordet ækwā taciturnus amnis*. Now I do not believe—I have already in the course of this book confessed my inability to *croire ce qu'on veut* in reference to them—in modern fanciful pronunciations of Latin and (still more) Greek But at the same time I know no real authority in ancient metrists (with whom I am not unacquainted) for the opposition between scansion and reading, and I am nearly certain that Calverley and others have gone a-wool-gathering over some imaginary theory of accentuation which calls fictitious cattle of sections home the wrong way over the sands Even if it were otherwise, and the passages cited from Cicero and others bore the meaning assigned to them as regards Latin, that could not affect English When Calverley declares that Tennysonian Alcaics, for instance, are not Horatian, I answer, "Certainly, for English is English, and Latin is Latin" And for that reason I am disinclined to English hexameters, elegiacs, Sapphics, Alcaics, and the whole tribe But my reason is not his reason, and I think his reason is the source of all the *mis*-reasoning on the subject down to that of the late Mr Stone He objects to such lines as

Fortia corpora fudit Hector,

or

Sol ut in aere lucet alto

I do not say that they are particularly good lines, but I think them badly *fingered* rather than badly *metred* And when he says that

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<sup>1</sup> In fact his *practice*, which naturally disappointed Mr Stone, is almost Kingsleyan in its anapaesticism

Calm as a mariner's rest in ocean

corresponds to them and is also not good, I reply, "If it is not, which is extremely doubtful, it is because it is not a movement which suits English, not because it answers to a movement which is not Latin" Good dactylic movements in English tip themselves up and become anapæstic. But good dactylic movements in Latin do not do this, and Calverley's Latin equivalents, *if bad*, are bad merely because the feet correspond too much to the word-endings, and there is no proper cæsura. For me I pronounce, in Latin verse, *virum* like the "Barum" of Kingsley's refrain,<sup>1</sup> and *cano* like "canoe" with "o" instead of "oo" sound. But I don't know that the Romans did, and whether they did or not, it seems to me to have no bearing on English verse.

I have just, indeed more than once recently, mentioned Charles Kingsley. Only the remembrance of a certain headlong character in him, accompanied by almost inseparable weakness in argument and exposition, can abate the keenness of my regret that he never took up the subject of prosody seriously. His practical gift in it, as is shown elsewhere, and will be shown again presently, was very noteworthy, and the remarks in his Letters<sup>2</sup> on *Andromeda* are of the most interesting kind. They are too much *ad hoc*, and too minute, for detailed examination here, and they show that he had never regularly theorised his practice, but his notions are singularly sound. He absolutely rejects the trochees—which refuse to be anything *but* trochees—of *Evangeline*, and while he will allow "stop" or "rest" to lengthen almost anything, he draws the line at syllables absolutely short *per se*. He knows all about "commonness," that Isle of Refuge which most prosodists, by ignoring it, convert into a Rock of Ruin. There is much matter for thought in the fact that, while enthusiastic for the Homeric hexameter, he is lukewarm about the Virgilian—a private opinion (for I

Kingsley and  
his remarks  
on *Andro-  
meda*

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* p. 259 note. With, of course, *f* instead of *ä*.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, i. 340 sq., original edition. In the abridgment, now more common, these are unfortunately omitted.

refuse to call it a heresy), in which I am bound to say I rather agree with him. There are remarkable points of contact between him and Poe on this subject, and if he is free from most of Poe's ignorances, he is, on the other hand, not even attempting to deal with the matter systematically. But I know no prosodist writing, in all the volumes which I have read on the subject, which gives me the idea of coming from the root of the matter more distinctly than the observations of these two poets—one of them among the most original, and both of them among the deftest, masters of practical versification that even the nineteenth century saw.

*Andromeda*  
itself

As for his practice in *Andromeda* itself, if he did not solve the problem it was merely because it is insoluble, and he certainly cut the knot as no one had done before him, and as no one, I think, but Mr Swinburne has done since. Here, at last, you have beautiful and genuine-sounding English verse which does bear a colourable resemblance to at least the Homeric hexameter, which is not rickety, which is not slipshod, which does not lend itself to prose reading as most of the accentualist hexameters do, and which certainly does not make a dochmiac with longs in the first, second, and fifth places of "undergraduate," and a molossus of "internal," and a rubbish-heap of the whole composition. He builded, indeed, unlike the quantity-people, much better than he knew, and he did not at once get into the knack even of practical building. His opening lines, though of the best of their kind, have still something of

Thwick-thwack thurlery bouncing

But after a time the metre takes the bit in its teeth, and goes off at its own—at its real—pace. Many lines, and not a few whole passages, you simply cannot scan wrong if you have any ear at all. Who can spoil

*Falls* | from the *sky* | like a *star*, | while the *wind* | rattles *hoarse* |  
in his *pin*|ions

into

Falls from the  
                   sky like a  
                           star while the  
                                   wind rattles  
   hoarse in his  
   pinions?

or

Rose | like a pil|lar of tall | white cloud | toward sil|ver Olym|pus,  
 or, best of all,

O|ver the moun|tain aloft | ran a rush | and a roll | and a roar|ing  
 Down|ward the breeze | came malig|nant and leapt | with a howl |  
           to the wa|ter,  
 Roar|ing in cran|ny and crag | till the pill|ars and clefts | of the  
           ba|salt  
 Rang | like a god-|swept lyre?

The catch at the beginning is here so great, and it is so thoroughly reinforced with extra-strong and pause-inviting *ictus* at the foot-ends, that only those persons whose ear cannot distinguish iambic from trochaic rhythm, or anapaestic from dactylic, can mistake it

It is, I say, beautiful, it is genuinely English, but is it in any real sense an equivalent for the classical hexameter? I doubt it very much. It comes, of course, very close to, and in Kingsley's case was probably suggested by, a certain kind of heavily dactyled Homeric variety such as the famous line <sup>1</sup>

σφῆ σιν ἄτασ θαλίη σιν ὑπέρ μωρον ἄλ γέ' ἔχον σιν

Greek is, like English, a language very much inclined to the anapaest, whereas it may be observed that at least some Latin anapaests play the reverse trick to that of which we are talking, and are sometimes inclined to *dactylise* themselves<sup>2</sup>. Yet even in Homer the anapaestic suggestion is little more than a suggestion, it is not in the least insistent or imperative, and in lines with spondaic

<sup>1</sup> *Od.* i. 34. The dotted lines, as usual, indicate the alternative (here anapaestic) scansion.

<sup>2</sup> Take, for instance, Prudentius, *Cathemerinon*, x., with lines like  
 Venient cito tempora cum jam,

resembling a cut-off three-and-a-half-foot ending from a hexameter. Even Seneca does not wholly guard against this by avoiding catalectic lines

admixture it tends to disappear altogether. In Latin hexameters it hardly ever even suggests itself, and in most cases distinctly negatives the suggestion when it occurs. Even those curious monosyllable-ended lines of Virgil,<sup>1</sup> on which some remarkable speculations have been based, do not present the slightest temptation to my ear (which is distinctly *temptable* that way) to hear anapæsts in them. Even when there is a faint suggestion of tendency at the beginning, as in the deliberately galloping line,<sup>2</sup> again universally known—

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum,

the dactylic rhythm establishes and vindicates itself before the line is finished.

I deny, therefore, that Kingsley's line is really an accentual hexameter; I assert that when it is perfect it is not a *dactylic* hexameter at all, but I admit that it is an excellent line, well worthy of English poetry, and deserving to produce—as I think it did at least help to produce—Mr Swinburne's still better attempts in similar kind.

Tennyson

Tennyson's "classical" practice, on the other hand, though of course of very great interest, is not much more than a curiosity. That it has been spoken of rather disrespectfully by the quantity-people, though it defers to a certain extent to their views, is natural and unimportant. But I have seen remarks on the Galliambics of "Boadicea" which seem to ignore the possibility of the suggestion that the nature of classical Galliambics is not entirely "matter of breviary." Latin is no doubt better suited to the metre than English, yet, allowing for that difference, "the strong contagion of the *ear*" has enabled Tennyson to transfer Catullus wonderfully.<sup>3</sup> I have glanced at the

<sup>1</sup> Such as "Oceano nox," "Exiguus mus," etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Aen.* viii. 596.

<sup>3</sup> Certainly far better than the late Mr Grant Allen, who, in his version and discussion of the *Atys* (*The Atys of C. Valerius Catullus*, London, 1892) seems to me to have gone hopelessly astray. I have known the *Atys* ever since I took it up for Moderations in the year 1865, and I have searched it carefully before writing this, but I can find no cadence in the least like

Drive back to the lonely wilderness the wretch who lingers here

For Mr Meredith's Galliambics *v. sup.* p. 378

hendecasyllables, of which much the same may be said, and I have said something of Calverley's criticism<sup>1</sup> of the Alcaics. In these especially, and in the half-dozen hexameters and pentameters, he has professedly, and I think on the whole successfully, gone on the principle of selecting words in which accent and real or fictitious quantity coincide, or at any rate do not collide. And he avoids the "suck" of the anapaest. Even so, you have to pronounce, in a quite unnatural way, "exp̄rimennnnnnnt," "hexāmētērrrrr." And of course he saw this, and he knew that the whole thing was rubbish, and (stating the fact<sup>2</sup>) naturally annoyed those who think it not rubbish<sup>3</sup>.

Matthew Arnold's *Lectures on Translating Homer* undoubtedly had much to do with the interest taken in the subject, and the practice in it, about this time, but I do not know that we need give much attention to them here. It is a particularly ungrateful task to deal faithfully with Mr. Arnold, and there is here no necessity for it, inasmuch as *quis laudavit* his own examples? and *quis vituperavit* much of what he says about other people's? <sup>un-Arnold and others</sup> <sup>4</sup> Still less need we dwell on Mr. Worsley (whose admirable Spenserians in translating the *Odyssey* cannot, however, lack a bare word of notice) or Lord Lindsay, Whewell

<sup>1</sup> On the Galliambics also C S C was not quite happy. He parodied them as

Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, gentleman, apothecary

This, as it stands, is unfair to Tennyson, while, if you pronounce gentlemen "gentlmn," it is quite Catullan.

<sup>2</sup> These lame hexameters the strong-winged music of Homer?

No, but a most burlesque, barbarous experiment

His remarks, given in the *Life*, annoy them still more.

<sup>3</sup> Let not any unwary person say, "Ho! are you the man who wants 'ministers' in a certain line of Milton?" Certainly *ille ego sum*. But there are degrees in quantity, and the strength "under proof" which will do for the completion of an iamb, in a continuous line, is not what will do for the half-foot, destined to bear a full pause strain, of the penthemimer, or even for the pivot syllable of a hexametrical caesura. The very curious "Kapiolani" poem may in part be taken with the hexameters, for its longest lines form a sort of dactylic octometer. I think I know why he wrote them, but the reason would be a little out of this story.

<sup>4</sup> His remarks on Spedding's sacrifice of rhythm are good to this day, but he does not seem to have had even a glimpse of the anapaestic safety valve in the other kind.

sterum, and a veritable herd<sup>1</sup> of pseudo-hexametrists during the sixties. None of them, I think I may say safely, came anywhere near Kingsley's practice, and none of them discovered that theory which lay at the root of it, though it escaped Kingsley himself. I suppose these poor people had screwed themselves up half consciously (as a writer in the *Christian Remembrancer* did deliberately) to the point of thinking English hexameters "natural." It is safe again to say that when the great Lord Derby denounced them as "a pestilent heresy" he was a good deal nearer the truth.

Mr  
Swinburne

The late Mr Swinburne stood in a very curious relation to the classicalisers. No one, not even in the sixteenth century, has left more various experiments in forms corresponding to those of Greek and Latin, few have ever written with better knowledge of the originals, and no one has ever produced better poetry in such forms. His fortunately prolonged life, the general respect in which he was latterly held, and perhaps the knowledge of the fact that, though not wicked in any other way, he was one of those very wicked animals who defend themselves vigorously when attacked, may have helped to prevent any thorough examination of his position by the quantity-mongers. But I should think it must trouble them even more than Tennyson's

That brief preceptist utterance, which we quoted<sup>2</sup> from the note to *Studies in Song*, as to the intolerance of English for metres dactylically or spondaically based, at once gives us the key, and it is scarcely necessary to go beyond the First *Poems and Ballads*, though you may go, with advantage, further to the "Choriambics" of the Second, and others down to "Evening on the Broads" especially, and elsewhere almost to the last. That is to say, Mr Swinburne saw that if you write these things in English you must transpose them to an English key. In

<sup>1</sup> Dart, Murray, Cochrane, Iandon, Simson, Grist, Herschell, and others whom I may have missed. (See Mr Omond for the dreary list.) One really wants some of the poor (even poorest) but homely creature iambic, to wash out the taste of all this stummed outlandish wine.

<sup>2</sup> *V sup* p 352

the hendecasyllabics, as noted above, very little of such transposing has to be done

In the month of the long decline of roses

by itself strikes an English ear as hardly more exotic than a famous line of Poe's,<sup>1</sup> and not at all more than Tennyson's trochaics<sup>2</sup> in the "Vision of Sin" The Sapphics are more touchy, for the abundance and persistent recurrence of dactylic rhythm introduces difficulty, and you cannot, owing to the strong trochaic beginning, get anapæstic twist on the ball It is beautiful, but a professed experiment, a *soletie* in the old culinary sense<sup>3</sup>

But when you turn back to "Hesperia" a more complicated and yet a more strictly organic and living phenomenon meets you The first line is practically a Kingsleyan hexameter of the very best kind—

Out | of the gol|den remote | wild west | where the sea | without  
shore | is ,

while the second—

Full of the sadness and sad if at all with the fulness of joy,  
is a pentameter of similar mould, with the centre gap cunningly filled in by the two short stitches "if at," capable, as you see below in

Thee I beheld as bird borne in with the wind from the west,  
of being duly equivalenced with one long stitch, like "borne" But the second line is capable also of being scanned exactly as the first—anacrusis and five anapæsts—but without the final redundance or hypercatalexis, and when, in your further explorations, you take other long lines you will find that the principle of equivalence is preserved throughout—that two initial shorts, as in

<sup>1</sup> Banners, yellow, glorious, golden

Shift "glorious" to the second foot and add another, and you actually have it

<sup>2</sup> Low voluptuous music winding trembled  
is the very thing

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this is also true of the "Choriambics"—

Love, what | ailed thee to leave | life that was made | lovely we thought |  
with love?—

though this is "made lovely" too



As a wind | blows in | from the au|tumn that blows | from the  
re|gion of sto|ries,

defeat the hexametrical movement, and pull off the mask at the beginning, though it returns at the end *You* end, therefore, as with "Abt Vogler," by perceiving that the metre is really anapæstic throughout, but that the poet has availed himself of the dactyl-simulating tendency of the English anapæst, or the anapæst-becoming tendency of the English dactyl, to make a new and brilliant and genuine combination, with stable rhythm and swing. And in "Evening on the Broads" he has carried this further still, providing in some cases regular anapæstic elegiacs

Over the shadowless waters adrift as a pinnace in peril,  
Hangs as in heavy suspense charged with irresolute light

As thus shown, these metres are strictly explicable as English verse, though I have seen it said of both, I think, that "nobody could possibly make out" their system<sup>1</sup>

The last stage

At the same time I admit—nay, I frankly and definitely and stoutly assert—that these are not classical elegiacs, that they are English verse on an anapæstic base, formed by the suggestion, rather than on the strict analogy, of their classical originals. I know that this is the case here, I believe that it will be the case always, and I am strengthened in that belief by the last phase of classical "versing" which has been seen, at the extreme end of the last century and during the present, after a considerable lull in attention to the matter. This has been due mainly, if not wholly, to the ingenious audacity of one younger prosodist, and to the powerful, though I think mistaken, support of an elder poet. I refer, I need hardly say, to the late Mr William Johnson Stone and the living Mr Robert Seymour Bridges

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps nobody could who was ignorant of classical, or insufficiently instructed in English, prosody, but *ignorantia juris* is no excuse. It should, however, be added that he allows himself also, in the "Evening," to fill the gap, and to complete the centre anapæst, instead of drawing on the pause. This actually has Greek precedent, as in Stesichorus

In order to appreciate their position, we must go back to some older men who were partially treated earlier, and especially to one who was scarcely more than glanced at, but who, taking expression and influence together, is of very great importance. To what extent James Spedding<sup>1</sup> was original in his contention, that to make an English hexameter you must not only not rely on accent, but must fly in the face of it, even my painful study of the accent-and-quantity battle from Foster downwards does not enable me to define precisely, nor do I observe that Mr. Omond has been more fortunate. The relation of his own few experiments to the original Elizabethan would-be-quantitative hexameter seems to me less than that of Clough's and Cayley's, and, indeed, like that of those of his (in a way) disciples, Mr. Stone and Mr. Bridges, very small indeed. Stanyhurst, Fraunce, Sidney, and the rest always tried to make their hexameters, with whatever supposed deference to classical rules of quantity in particular words, hexametrical to an ordinary English ear in general rhythm. So, in a way, bad as I think his, does Cayley. Clough, having emerged from a complete debauch of the worst accentual looseness, screwed himself up more in his quantitative experiments, but even he, I think, retained some respect for what a hexameter, especially a Greek hexameter, sounds like to an English ear which has been taught to read it scanningly, though he did his best to get rid of that respect. Mr. Stone thought a line<sup>2</sup> of his a "perfect pentameter"—asked, indeed, quite touchingly if it is not? The answer is that it is not a pentameter at all, but an awkward spondaic hexameter of the ordinary English Southey-Longfellow

Reversion to  
Spedding, etc

<sup>1</sup> Spedding's paper reviewing Arnold's *Lectures*, and criticising another paper in which Munro had denied quantity in English altogether, first appeared in *Fraser* for June 1861. It was afterwards included, with addition, in his *Reviews and Discussions*, 1879. A fair inkling of its line may be got from Arnold's "Last Words," subjoined to the *Lectures* later, but the essay itself should be read. There is a crispness about it, as about the whole volume, which is rare in such work, though it is to some extent capable of being anticipated from the quaint addition to the title, "(Not relating to Bacon)."

<sup>2</sup> Now with mighty vessels loaded, a lordly river

type, and this not at all on "accentual" but on strict English quantitative principles. "With" we have granted as long apparently, though rather to my surprise, "-y" could be lengthened at a pinch, "vessels" is a certain trochee and a possible spondee, not by "accent" in the least, but in strict "time", "-ess-", with the double hiss (I know perfectly well what I am saying), is "as long as my arm", and "-cls" is again granted, while in the pronunciation it has nearly as much accent as "vess-". To scan "river" "rivēr" is merely childish petulance, because it is pronounced the other way.

Spedding, however, went much further. He started with the principle that accent in Greek and Latin, but especially in Latin, was more or less the same thing as in English. Now this principle was denied by Munro, who, as far as the classical languages are concerned, was certainly a higher authority. As far as my own very humble opinion goes—an opinion at any rate formed by fairly extensive reading—I do not believe that anybody knows with any exactness what either Greek or Latin accent was. I know, of course, that in late Byzantine days it must have become something like ours, or they could not have made it the basis of their new trimeters and hexameters. But that the practice of twelfth-century mongrels, or mere barbarians, can give us any line to that of pure Greeks who wrote quite different verses a millennium and a half before, I believe as little as I believe that any teacher of philology or phonetics really knows how our Anglo-Saxon forefathers pronounced.<sup>1</sup>

But, I say, Spedding started with this hypothesis of different if not exactly "combative" accent, as compared with quantity, in Greek, Latin, and English, and specially in English and Latin. Accent and "length," it seems, do not coincide in Virgil *or* in Homer. As for Homer, the first glance at an open page will show how utterly wrong this is, unless the Alexandrians were wrong likewise,

<sup>1</sup> This is not a mere fling. From Mr. Stone's observations in particular, I am sure that phonetic doctrinarism has very much more to do with this particular matter than prosodic or poetic knowledge.

while, as we have no accented Virgil,<sup>1</sup> he can no more prove than we can disprove. But then he apparently made, in his own mind, an enormous jump, from this perilous take-off. "Let us," he at least seems to say, "make accented syllables different from our 'long' syllables in English and we shall get Virgilian hexameters." And it is in this that he has been followed by the latest school. It sounds rather Gilbertian, but this and nothing else (except justificatory rules, of which more presently) is their game.

But the badness of the fruit is not the only sign of the rottenness of the tree. One of the commonplaces for fighting on the subject is the almost famous position that "quantity" is a dactyl, while "quiddity" is a tribrach. This Mr Spedding laid down, and while Mr Arnold thought it a sort of counsel of perfection, due to almost impossible nicety of ear, and Munro saw no difference between them, the late Mr Stone "would have thought that there did not live a man who, if the question were fairly put to him, could fail to detect the difference." Well, I am that man, or rather, though I do see that "quantity" is a rather (not much) more *dactyl* dactyl than "quiddity," I deny that the latter is a tribrach at all. And if anybody thinks to trap me by asking me to produce an English tribrach (the bricks and the sticks of the trap being not unconnected with Guest's denial of the existence of such a foot, and the difficulty of producing an *unaccented* trisyllable), it will not give me much trouble to play Brer Rabbit on that occasion. For the thing is a good instance of what is itself one of the most frequent and deadly traps in English prosody, the taking of single words as examples of quantity. As a matter of fact, the general tendency of English is *not* to make its feet of single words, except for special effect; and what we have to consider is not the prosodically fortuitous assemblage of syllables in a *word*, but the

<sup>1</sup> The practice of Plautus, appealed to for Latin accent, seems to me not much more satisfactory. You would get into beautiful man's nests if you took, say, Swift and Barham, in some of their attitudes, for English authorities on accent.

genuinely commissioned assemblage of syllables in a *foot*. Whether there is an English tribrach or not in one word I hardly care, that "quiddity" is not such a word, except by special licence, I know, that a tribrach can be easily made up of the last two syllables of "quiddity" and a short one at the beginning of another word, I know likewise. And it is all I need to know. Still one has, in this world, to attend even to unnecessary things, and the rules of quantity given by Spedding and others must, I suppose, be referred to. But not much.

For—though I think I have shown already, and shall hope to show in the Appendix, that Munro went too far in denying quantity altogether—how, in fact, is it possible to draw up "rules" for quantity in such a language as ours? Even if you content yourself—as I do, and as I am by no means sure that the ancients did not<sup>1</sup>—with defining verse-quantity as "that which fits for a place in verse," though you will have no difficulty in practice, you can never reduce to any rule a vocabulary which contains three such words as "dèsert" = "wilderness" (to take an example already brought in), "desèrt" = "merit," and "dessèrt" = "unwholesome things got for visitors," as a child once said. Beginning at the other end, and constructing rules *a priori*, I am told that "bānners," "fōllow," "yēllow," are short, judging not by accent but by time in pronunciation and quantity of vowel.

Bānners, yēllow, glorious, golden,

*short!* Why to any one with a poetical ear and tongue "banners" and "yellow" here must be doubly or trebly "longed" trochees, the first syllable being the equivalent of that of the undoubted long-short "glōrī" and "gōldēn."

Again, how can "follow" be short in such a line as

A bird to the right sang fol-low,

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<sup>1</sup> This may seem impudently bold, but not, I think, to any one who weighs the undoubted facts of their insistence upon *degrees* in quantity (which did not, for all that, affect verse place), and their whole handling of the questions of natural quantity and quantity by position.

or in such a part of one as

Fol-low, fol-low, thou shalt win?

I am very well aware that this notion of prolongation is called a delusion by some worthy persons. But time is time, and length of time is length of time. With Pickwickian-fictitious uses of these words, *je n'ai que faire*<sup>1</sup>

After the battles of the sixties there was some rest over the prosodic world, in this province at any rate, for a generation, till at last a youthful champion, already referred to, waked the lists again. In writing of the late Mr W J Stone there are many things that condition the treatment if not the judgment. His early death, the unanimously favourable opinion of his friends, the *verve* and independence of his prosodic work, and the very considerable influence which it has already exercised, all come in. I am, however, bound to say that I cannot but regard him as one of the questers after a mar's-nest Eldorado in our division, and as having written—not merely, as Mr Omond has gently put it, with insufficient knowledge of his predecessors,<sup>2</sup> but (which is far worse) with insufficient knowledge of English poetry, English pronunciation, and other all-important matters. That he follows, though with his own difference, Spedding, Calverley, Clough, and the others<sup>3</sup> who not merely disapprove of the accentual English hexameter, but wish to make a new kind—who not merely refuse to base the verse on “accent,” but deliberately set “accent,” and a good deal more than will bear that name, at defiance—is one thing that in support of this he advances or adopts all manner of demonstrably false or dubiously true propositions, not necessarily connected with it, is another

<sup>1</sup> I shall, of course, be fallen upon from both sides for this. But I can neither recede from, nor compromise on it, and I say flatly that a man who pronounces “batter” in the same time as that in which he pronounces “atom” pronounces wrong.

<sup>2</sup> He calls Webbe a “very well-read man”—Webbe who thought Horace posterior to Ovid, and Homer to Pindar.

<sup>3</sup> He does not seem to have known Cayley.

Thus he<sup>1</sup> says<sup>1</sup> that "*even* Tennyson" (for he admits Tennyson's usual quantitative correctness) "has 'my' and 'be' short" Of course he has, because "my" and "be" *are* frequently, though not invariably, short in correct English pronunciation, as are most monosyllables He adopts, without question, Guest's absolutely arbitrary and certainly false principle, that two consecutive syllables cannot be accented While agreeing with those who think that accent cannot lengthen, he has a most tell-tale phrase about "accented syllables *degenerating* into long," which gives him almost entirely into the hands of his enemies. It is again tell-tale that he wants phonetic 'polling,'<sup>2</sup> or, in other words, desires to pin English down to an arbitrarily selected standard of pronunciation But the most fatal thing of all is his eager adoption, and almost caricaturing, of Mr Symonds's notions about the "go-as-you-pleaseness" of blank verse He thinks that the art of it—the art, remember, of Shakespeare, and of Milton, and of Tennyson—is "without limit and without foundation" A man who thinks that must either have no ear for English verse at all, or no power of getting at its principles

One is therefore less surprised than in some other cases to find Mr Stone's actual hexameters impossible things—things, in fact, worse than impossible Such a line as

Is my weary travel ended? much further is in store,

is worth reams of discussion of the system Not only has this no dactylic-hexametrical effect in English, except to those who "see grass blue" prosodically, but it has the even more hopeless fault of being almost, or altogether, a real English metrical entity of another kind If you put "No," or something of that sort, before "much"—even if you make a strong but legitimate pause at the query—

<sup>1</sup> *On the Use of Classical Metres in English* (Oxford, 1898) was originally a pamphlet Mr Bridges reprinted it, without its specimens, at the close of a new edition of his *Milton's Prosody* in 1901, Mr Stone having died meanwhile

<sup>2</sup> As I have hinted before, I believe the phonetic Duessa (rightly so called, inasmuch as no two phoneticians agree with each other) had most to do with Mr Stone's undoing

it will be an excellent trochaic tetrameter of the "Locksley Hall" type, and if you make *two* lines of it—

Is my weary travel ended?  
Much further is in store—

the lack of the *cheville* will hardly be felt. Now that what is meant for one metre should suggest another is one of the most certain signs of failure. I cannot therefore but think that Mr Stone, in common with all the "combative accent" men, tried to do something not worth doing, and failed even to do that. It is, moreover, extremely noteworthy that he, like the rest of them, never seems to have noticed that the English hexameter when it succeeds is anapæstic, and it is hugely "for thought" that, quoting Mr Swinburne's verse, he suggests that one of its defects is that it is "so easy." It is ill "speaking sarcastic" of dead men, but one is really tempted to suggest that if Mr Stone found the writing of "Hesperia" and "Evening on the Broads" so easy, he had much better have set to work and turned us out a hundred or so pieces of that kind. The baser sort of *Evangeline* stuff is easy, no doubt, but that such fabric as that of "Andromeda" or "Hesperia" is not, the extreme rarity of it shows beyond all possible dispute. Moreover, the mere prescription of *cruces*, as things to be aimed at by the poet, is again tell-tale in the highest degree. The poet scales heights, but he is not an acrobat. Once more, I fear that Mr Stone's ear for true English verse must have been rather hard, and very particularly indiscriminating.

I feel so strongly that the "lordly river" (ditrochaic, not choriambic) of history ought not to shallow itself out into the miseries of contemporary controversy, that I omit some further *adversaria* on Mr Stone. But I think I am bound, for more reasons than one, to dwell a little, though a very little, on one remark of his which opens up that phonetic question at which I have glanced. He refers, in his disapproval of Munro's utter denial of English quantity (a disapproval which, as it happens in the particular instance, I share, though in no other) to "the present



condition of phonetic science," pointing the reference, not merely to English but to Greek, by the words "how the Greeks came by their scansion of *Pēnelōpē*," a scansion which I should as little dream of questioning as the English scansion of *Pēnelōpē*. Now, I would fain ask, in the utmost humility, what can "the present" or, in the absence of not yet made discoveries or a special revelation, any future "state of phonetic science" tell us about Greek scansion, pronunciation, accentuation, or anything else? I am not (let anybody make as much of it as he pleases) a "scientific character." From my point of view science is facultative and literature necessary. But, at different times of my life, I have paid some attention to different sciences, and I have found most of them—all of them to which I should grant the name—obedient to the Science of Sciences, to Logic. When, for instance, and to take a familiar one, geology or palæontology finds a bone and says, "Judging by analogy, and the neighbourhood and structure in which I find similar bones, I can give you a tolerably certain beast," I have no objection to accepting that animal in this bony light, with very little, if any, qualification. But unless some one should rise from the dead, where have we got our bone of a single sentence as Pericles or Sophocles, as Cicero or Virgil, pronounced it? Phonetics may possibly tell us something about a certain sound when heard, and it may tell us, for aught I know infallibly, by what physical movements that sound is produced. But how can it tell us what a sound *was*—a thing which only exists in hearing, which has not been heard for two thousand five hundred years, less or more, and of which not even any (notoriously treacherous) transliteration or transposition exists?<sup>1</sup> The quackery of all the Albumazars

<sup>1</sup> My old friend Dionysius Thrax (*v. sup.* 1 167), whom Mr. Stone quotes, may give us, in musical terms, the differences of pitch between "acute" and "grave," but this does not really help us at all. And we can scarcely base valid literary theories on strict cries as in the "Cave ne eas" and "Cauneas" instance. But yet it would be possible to accept much, if not all, "reformed" pronunciation of Greek and Latin, while maintaining every argument in this chapter against English hexameters.

or Aristodemuses, who have deceived or amused<sup>1</sup> market-places for the same period, can never have gone further than this

With regard to Mr Bridges' own actual experiments<sup>1</sup> in quantitative hexameters, I think it unnecessary to indulge in detailed criticism, or rather permissible to indulge in comparative silence. I was forced, against my will, to enter into some controversy with him on the subject of Milton: there does not seem to me to be any such force here. At the same time, it would be something of a *rifiuto* if I gave no opinion on the results. That opinion may be perhaps best expressed as follows. I believe, speaking as a fool, that I have some ear and some fancy for verse. Many years ago, in the time of the popularity of the French forms on the one hand, and of the *Epu of Hades* on the very much other, I scribbled a skit in triolet<sup>2</sup> about that book. But I did not find fault with Sir Lewis Morris's versification, except that it was flat and *mou*, and I find my "passion for verse" greater than ever. There is hardly any form of it, in any of the languages with which I have more or less acquaintance, and even in some which are to me sound only, that I cannot understand, and, in differing degrees, relish. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites seem to me able to convey something of their celebration of the wonderful works of God in this kind: the perfect Greek metres in all their native variety, and the perfect Latin metres in all their borrowed elegance, never fail to "put the comethci" on me. I can see the aboriginal raciness of the Saturnian, and can even make allowances for such singular hybrids as the accentual-quantitative hexameters of Commodian, and the accentual-quantitative trimeters of the Byzantines. English rhythm, through all its mainly apparent dissimilarities, I can trace, and French

<sup>1</sup> For these see *The Feast of Bacchus, Now in Wintry Delights* (1903), *Ibant Obscure* (1909), etc.

<sup>2</sup> I've a passion for verse,  
But not, not, Lewis Morris—  
Be it Zend, Greek, or Erse,  
I've a passion for verse

I've read Gower—so terse!  
I've read William of Morris—  
I've a passion for verse,  
But not—not—Lewis Morris!

through<sup>6</sup> the more real anomalies of Mediæval and Renaissance and Neo-Classic and Romantic measure, and German in its wood-notes from Walther to Heine Slight as is my knowledge of Italian, I can perceive the unique harmony of Dante, and slighter as is my knowledge of Spanish, I can revel in the shorter murmur and the longer roll of the rhythm of that glorious tongue I do not know whether Charles Reade invented, or not, the "barbaric yawp" of

I *slew* him , | he *fell* by | the Wurra Gur|ra river,

but I think it a capital lilt And I have derived, for many years, extreme delight from Mr. Bridges' own exercises within the provinces of recognised English prosody, and from some even of his excursions into debatable lands But if these quantitative hexameters of his, or those of his friend Mr. Stone, or the others to which I have referred, are English verse at all—if they are even English rhythm at all—I am reduced to the admirable conclusion of the elders "I am one Dutchman, and he is another, and there's an end of it"

I have, indeed, sometimes thought that the whole of this hexameter battle, including both study and practice, arises from, and illustrates, that extraordinary *confusion* of mind with which nearly all English writers have approached, and even still continue to approach, the subjects of Accent and Quantity in our language It does not seem, in most cases, to matter much whether the student is a classical scholar or whether he is not In both cases he seems, not merely to start with the idea that English prosody must be different (in which he is right), but to assign the differences *a priori*, instead of by experiment and observation, in which process it is ten to one that he goes wrong I have chosen for special example Cayley (that we may stir only "the equal waters of the dead" which will not splash or splutter) and his

Dons, unde|graduātes ,

but I might have taken scores of instances

It is because one meets these impossibilities sometimes,

and not unfrequently, that hexameters are intolerable in English. I have conceded a very large licence in some monosyllables. I am sure that "and" is susceptible, and properly susceptible, of the value "nd" as well as of the value "ann-n-n-n-n<sup>x</sup>-d" and of almost every value between, that "the" may be everything from just above "th'" (the apostrophe being not a sign of elision, but of the minimum of actual vocalisation) to the value which "thee" has in the last line of "Drink to me only with thine eyes", that every monosyllabic preposition can be "a miss or a mile" prosodically. But I think that the poet, not a burlesque poet, who lengthens the indefinite article, will find it snap in his fingers, and not for Venice, or Venus, would I consent to allow "underrrrgraduaytc"

As for its not being necessary so to *pronounce* it, I must be very bold again. I do not believe that there are, *in English*, any "metrical fictions". Whether there were any in the classical languages is a question which I need not here discuss. For our present purpose it matters not one scrap whether the Greeks actually ran words together and said τᾶλλο as we say "tother", whether the Romans got rid in verse, as often as they could, of that final "m" which (as we *do* know for once!) some of them thought so ugly. Our business is with English, and I repeat that, *in English*, there are practically no metrical fictions, and that metre follows, though it may sometimes slightly force, pronunciation.

The only period that can possibly be quoted against me is the eliding or apostrophating period from the mid-sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. And this, as it happens, is not against me at all. I have—I hope I may say it without presumption—at least shown some cause for believing that Milton's metrical fictions are themselves a fiction. We have the positive testimony of Dryden—the greatest poet who certainly belonged to the eliding school—that you must *not* elide any but a non-pronounced syllable. We have the suggestion of Shenstone, at the beginning of the revolt, to *restore* the full pronunciation of "watery". We have, from Bysshe to

the *Edinburgh* Reviewer of Southey, cautions, almost as emphatic as Dryden's, against eliding what must be pronounced. These self-denying and self-tormenting generations impoverished their poetry on principle, seriously, and really. They did not pronounce "watery" and scan "wat'ry," and I am sure they would not have pronounced "undeigraduate" and scanned "underrrgraduaytc."

That it may be possible—since Tennyson and some others have done it—to establish an apparent concordat between accent and quantity, by selecting words which satisfy both systems, nobody can deny. It may be as legitimate a poetic amusement as any other prosodic *tour de force*—as pantoums and *emperières à triple couronne*, as poetical bellows and altars, as anagrams and lipograms and acrostics, as Sir Francis Kynaston's Latin rhyme-royal (to which it is very close) or Dr King's Greek-gibberish macaronics<sup>1</sup>. But even so, it is gymnastics, not consistent and sober walking. In any other form it is either, to take the serious view, a "pestilent heresy," or, to take a less serious one, a rather idle loss of time, or, in the third place, as in Kingsley's and other really good examples, a very successful attempt to do something which the poet did not mean to do, or, as in Mr Swinburne's, a still more successful attempt to do something which he knows not to be a hexameter at all. The thing (including Alcaics, Sapphics, and the rest) is against the genius of the language, it is superfluous if it were not, it is a mistake, in each and every respect, except that of its unintentional by-products or its deliberate evasions. For every language has a genius, weak or strong. Ours has a strong one, and a strong genius is an entity that you cannot get over, a "chiel that winna ding."

<sup>1</sup> Κυματε μετράες, etc. V Delcypierre's *Macaronéana*, p. 326, or the original. This was the elder King (*v sup* n 417). By the way, it is well worth anybody's while to read Mr Housman, in the *Classical Review* for 1899 (vol. xiii p. 317), on Mr Stone.

NOTE TO SECOND EDITION.—My friend Mr Omond in *English Metrists* excepts this chapter from his general and generous recommendation, with special exceptions, of course, of this book. I can only say that I "can no other" adding that it had considerable if not entire approval from the late Professor Hardie, whom Mr Omond respected as much as I do. The Dark Tower "quantity" (*v sup* in Preface) is responsible here as elsewhere for this quarrel.

## CHAPTER IV

### LATER PROSODISTS

Plan—Mr Omond's work—Sidney Walker—Masson—Patmore—  
Mr Wadham—Tom Hood the Younger—Dr Abbott—Professor  
Sylvester—Professor Earle—Mr Henry Sweet—Mr Symonds  
—Mr A J Ellis—Conway—Mr Ruskin—Mr Edmund Gurney  
—Mr Shadworth Hodgson—Professor Fleeming Jenkin—  
Professor Mayor—The "monopressure" theory—Mr William  
Larmie—Mr J M Robertson—MM Van Dam and Stoffel  
—Other foreign students of English prosody Dr Schipper—  
M Verrill—Mr Hallard—Mr Bateson—Mr William Thomson  
—Mr C F Keary—Mr Hewlett—Remarks on "Fancy"  
prosodies

In the present chapter I propose to notice the principal English contributors to prosodic discussion during the latter part of the nineteenth century and even onwards, excluding those who have been specially mentioned in the "Hexameter," or last, chapter, as well as those American writers who will have their proper, if inadequate, place in the next. Once more I must interject a reminder that what I have endeavoured to give here is a "History of Prosody," and only incidentally a "History of Prosodists", and once more make reference to Mr Omond's work. I shall not notice that work itself directly or substantively, though I shall make frequent glances at it, and I shall not make the idle attempt to attain apparent completeness by mentioning everybody whom he mentions. Not merely from the thorough nature of his survey, but from the extremely convenient tables, chronological and bibliographical, which his books contain, they are indispensable to any one who takes the same side of the study, and

most useful to those who do not find themselves so much attracted to that side as to others. Considering the extended interest which is now taken (whether always according to knowledge or not is neither here nor there) in prosodic inquiry, it is to be hoped that Mr Omond will continue to supplement his reports on the accruing literature, and still more his original studies<sup>1</sup> on the theoretical side of the subject. But we must go back for some half century to resume our own review.

Sidney  
Walker

- Earliest to be noticed—they belong, indeed, more to our last prosodic chapter, for their author died in 1846—come the interesting *annotatiunculae*, 1854, of Sidney Walker on *Shakespeare's Versification*. These are well known, at first or second hand, to most students of Shakespeare himself, but they do not often touch on actual metrical points, and where they do, are, as might be expected from their date, a good deal coloured by "decasyllabism." Moreover, they are, even on partly metrical matters, more occupied with questions of spelling and pronunciation than with those of pure metre. One matter of great importance is, however, to be set to Walker's credit. He is the first writer I know to be sound on a question on which I had made up my own mind long before I ever read him—that Shakespeare's *short* lines (at least up to seven syllables—a rather irrational limitation due to the decasyllabism just mentioned) are not careless *fragments* but intentional and regular *fractions*.

Masson

Dallas's *Poetics* (see last chapter on Prosodists) naturally produced reviews, some of which dealt with prosody. One was by the late Professor Masson, whom not only am I more specially bound (as the bidding prayer says) to mention with honour, but than whom few sounder prosodists existed in his generation. His review, and another article on "Prose and Verse," were republished in his *Essays on English Poets* (1856), while, later, his edition

<sup>1</sup> If I have said less of his *Study of Metre* (1903) than of his two other books, it is for much the same reason as that for which I have said little of Mr Budge's articles and pamphlets other than the *Milton*, though I am in far more general agreement with it.

of Milton contained a very thorough and well-argued survey of that poet's versification. Elsewhere Professor Masson's prosodic remarks inclined, as his literary criticism was wont to do, rather to the side of general questions than to that of form, but the Milton study is thoroughly technical.

Another incidental fruit of Dallas's book was an essay <sup>Patmore</sup> which has had curious *fata*. Coventry Patmore's poetical position has been dealt with. As I always thought better of him than most people did, I may be excused for ~~not~~ thinking quite so well of him as some do, and as, in reference to this essay,<sup>1</sup> even Mr Omond does. It is true that even Mr Omond's praise is rather chequered.

For myself, I recognise in Patmore a knowledge, almost unique for his time, of the actual history of his subject, freedom from many popular errors, a true sense of poetry, and a large number of acute and valuable *aperçus*. But I do not quite think him a "consecutive thinker" (at least, if his thoughts followed each other, they stopped far short of the procession of the subject), he seems to me to have paid less attention than he should to the actual *Corpus Poetarum*, and his essay simply swarms with crotchety and temerarious deliverances. He must have been an early, if not an original, defender of the thesis that "the finest versification exhibits *conflict* between the law of the verse and the freedom of the language." How sick I am of that word "conflict" in literary criticism! It seems to have become as necessary for a certain class of critics to ask "Where is your conflict?" as it was for another once to ask "Where is your brown tree?" Depend upon it, whenever "conflict" between language and line is observable, the poet has not learnt his business, the poetry is certainly not "finest." That he also insisted on, if he did not invent, the "isochronous interval," is none of my objections to him. I believe in it myself, though, as I

<sup>1</sup> It has had vicissitudes in print, but is probably known to most who know it in the *Poetical Works*, vol. II 217-267 (London 1886). I understand, however, that it has since been turned out of this and joined to his other prose work, which contains some exceedingly unequal poetical criticism.



formerly<sup>1</sup> pointed out,<sup>1</sup> I prefer to economise letters and to call it a "foot" But the unblest word "accent" is admitted by his eulogists to be a stumbling-block to him, and, for myself, I should say that the position that "metre is a series of isochronous intervals *marked by accents*" is as wrong as wrong can be Where, to ask only two of fifty questions, is the *accent* in a pause-foot or "silence-foot" which he himself very rightly allows?<sup>2</sup> Where is it, for any metrical purpose, in a tribrach? That there may be some equivalent for it in these places is quite true, and is my own belief, but that is quite a different thing Then he multiplies and extends his pauses and pause-feet themselves in a manner quite bewildering, actually insisting on a full one at the end of *every* heroic line On the other hand, his remark that, to be certain of the base in a line, you must see its context, is absolutely sound, and has been endorsed again and again in these pages<sup>3</sup> On the whole, it is probable that the piece has had influence, but chiefly, I think, in starting that "fancy prosody" of which I shall speak at the close of this chapter It is admittedly too "cloeutionary", it is in parts too musical, and such a thing, for instance, as the assignment of an end-pause equal to *three* syllables in the trochaics of the "Vision of Sin" appears to me, I confess, absolutely absurd in itself, and absolutely destructive of the harmony of the passage

Mr Wadham

For some years prosodist energy was mainly deflected to the "sand-ploughing" of the hexameter question, but 1869 saw much work of general character The date of Mr Edward Wadham's *English Versification*, its sub-title,<sup>4</sup> a certain appearance of thoroughness which the first turning-over of it may impart, make it a disappointing book to read through That it is in the main an ingenious

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 1. 82. *note*.

<sup>2</sup> Of course the people who tell you that the place of the accent is "at the beginning of the syllable" may have no difficulty here But though I recognise a vacuum, I have a difficulty in reaccenting it

<sup>3</sup> A critic whose ability is highly spoken of by his friends, and not ill shown in his scanty work, Mr Armine Kent, seems to have denied this, but he was certainly wrong

<sup>4</sup> *A Complete Practical Guide to the whole subject*

and persevering attempt to make a new terminology of the subject, though this cannot be said to be very much in its favour, is not necessarily against it. Iambic and trochaic measures are "forward" and "backward". Blank verse and heroics are "march-metre", trochaics are "tripping metre", anapæsts "quick-verse". Ordinary stanzas are "staves" rhymed and unrhymed, longer ones are "lays". Dactylic metre is "invert", and "crown," "mid-about," "main," and the like await the inquirer's curiosity in new or specialised senses.

As was said, there is, or may be, no great harm in all this though it seems "lost labour" in an almost supreme degree, and suggests the impolite Æschylean addition thereto. But the reader will not read far without discovering that terminological innovation is by no means the sole or the most dubious characteristic of the treatise. Mr Wadham attempts a little history, but only to show—I apologise to him if he is alive, as is not improbable—that he really knows, or knew in 1869, nothing whatever about the subject. The statement that "the literary change from alliteration to rhyme *was mainly coeval with the Reformation, but had been preluded by Chaucer,*" establishes this fact once for all, and, except for the knowledge of the existence of alliteration, might have been written in the darkest darkness of the seventeenth or the eighteenth century on the matter. Many doctrines of Mr Wadham's, moreover, though his eccentric terminology and some other obscurities of expression make misunderstanding possible, are regrettably Byssian. It is, he thinks, a barbarism to put the "fixed cæsura" (which means the end-pause) between words closely connected in sense. "Elision" is evidently his doctrine, but he dislikes it, and lays down, as positively as Dryden himself in kindred matter, though without his excuse, that a syllable should never be cut out unless the word is thoroughly pronounceable without it. He has, it would appear, no doubt about the "general ill effect" of trisyllabic feet, though he allows redundancy at the (real) cæsura and *perhaps* (I am not sure) extra-metrical syllables.

generally.<sup>1</sup> He has no love for blank verse, and evidently despises "quick" (anapæstic) metre as much as Bysshe himself did. In fact he is a sort of innovating survival—new Wadham is but old Bysshe writ in a different dialect. He, however, dislikes rhyme, and suggests assonance instead. But for one thing we may be rather grateful to him—that he may have led some people to be on their guard against the musical heretics, by his observation that *music* prefers the "backward," (*ie* trochaic) mode, and must begin with an accented syllable, while *verse* in English prefers iambic or the "forward." Any way of keeping this contrast prominent must be salutary.

Another book originally issued in this year, Mr R. F. Brewer's *Manual of English Prosody* (reissued in 1893 as *Orthometry*), has had the very rare if not unique honour, for a prosody-book, of being placed on the reference shelves of the British Museum. In one way it does not ill deserve this, for it contains a great deal of positive information, plenty of examples, and a good supply of that tabular classification which is popularly supposed to have a peculiarly educational effect. Perhaps, for persons who do not go beyond the reference shelves, it is as good as another, or better. But it has some defects which seem to me rather serious. That it unhesitatingly adopts the accent-basis is not one of these. But I am driven to believe that Mr Brewer adopted this, not because of any vital belief in it on his own part, but simply because forty-nine people out of fifty say so. In his own heart he seems to think prosody chiefly a matter of words and names, in which, once more, he may have the majority with him, but is most utterly and terribly wrong. For instance, he treats, as such a matter, the question whether, when you meet a syllable more than usual in a line, you should account for it as part of a trisyllabic foot, or as extra-metrical. Now, for the moment, we may suspend taking a side on this. But what may not be suspended is that the difference is vital, not verbal. The trisyllabists may be right, or the extra-metrists may be right, but whichever is, the other must be wholly and hideously wrong.

The entire life of the line is affected its proportions, its constitution, its rhythm, all become totally different. Failure to recognise this argues a conception of prosody which is little more than arithmetical, and has given up the slight redeeming features of the severer arithmetical systems. And this attitude of the Deputy of Achaia is so frequent in Mr Brewer that one really rather wonders why he took the trouble to write a book on the subject.

Yet another 1869 verse-book—the *Rules of Rhyme*,<sup>1</sup> Tom Hood the Younger by Tom Hood the Younger—is interesting, not merely for the fact that it was written by the son of one of the deffest of our verse-smiths. He was more of a scholar than his father, though less of a genius, and there is both scholarship and wit in his contention that, if English versification were taught at school, we should be spared much of the plague of minor poetry.<sup>1</sup> From this point of view, if from no other, the "Dictionary of Rhymes," which fills nearly half his book, is not out of place, and the "Introduction" and "Appendix," of about sixty pages each, which complete it, contain not a little good sense and sound doctrine. Naturally one differs on a good many points, and he is certainly wrong in forbidding "fire" as two syllables. Sometimes he makes odder mistakes, as when, on Southey's observation that the Alexandrine is composed of *two* six-syllable lines, he observes, "Of course by six syllables Southey means six feet." But his dicta are generally sound enough, and his taste good. He owes something to his immediate predecessors, including even Mr. Wadham, and a good deal to poets, including Mr. Swinburne. He succeeds in conveying much positive information. In fact, supplemented, corrected, and commented upon by a capable teacher, this would probably have made a better school-handbook of the subject than anything I have seen.

At any rate, I could have recommended it myself with Dr. Abbott much more confidence than a book of more regular

<sup>1</sup> I do him the justice of taking him to mean, not that in more cases minor poetry would be written better, but that in fewer cases it would be written—at least published—at all.

scholasticism, and of much greater vogue, which also appeared in this prolific year. This was Dr Abbott's *Shakespearean Grammar*, the teaching of which, not to mention its own later editions, reappeared in *English Lessons for English People*, by Abbott and Sceley (1871). Dr Abbott has the schoolmaster's knack of unhesitating legislation, which in some, but not in all, who have been schoolmasters, a sense of humour tempers. Probably no book is, or no two books are, more responsible for authoritative dissemination of doctrines that are sometimes demonstrably wrong, and still more often very doubtful. It is not the fact that two consecutive syllables in a word cannot be "metrically accented." It is not the fact that three consecutive "accented" syllables cannot be found together. The rigid syllabism of these books necessitates an admission of extra-metrical syllables, whereas extra-metre, as has been said, is no metre. No modern prosodist is responsible for so many arbitrary rules, and for so many impossible scansiones, as is Dr Abbott. If these statements seem too peremptory, the excuse is, *À Gascon, Gascon et demi*. If Dr Abbott had been content to suggest instead of to lay down, if—admitting trisyllabic feet—he had made more use of them, and if he had not permitted himself, while actually using a foot-system, to be dominated by the upstart "accent"—he might have made very valuable contributions to the subject. And he has made contributions which, to the expert, are valuable, though they must have been doubtfully so to the inexpert. As a detail, the suggestion of "catch" for the English anacrusis has the merit, exceptional among prosodic innovations in terms, of being a real improvement. It for once expresses, in English, what, in English, happens, better than the Greek word does.

Professor  
Sylvester

The short title of Professor J. J. Sylvester's tract on the *Laws of Verse* (originally published in 1870), and its author's deserved reputation as a mathematical philosopher of the first order, have attracted to it, not more attention than it deserves, but a kind of attention likely to result in disappointment. The most interesting thing about it

is the author's agreement, from almost the most<sup>1</sup> opposite preparation and point of view conceivable, with Poe—an agreement which extends to the doctrine that accent *creates* quantity. The tractate—with its terminological exactitude of anastomosis, syzygy, symptosis, and the like—may alarm some readers, but it is most amusingly written, and illustrated with many experiments of the author's own in translation. The main purpose is to recommend syzygy, not in its classical sense, but in that of “apt juncture of syllables.”

I have, I think, both read and heard remarks of a somewhat disrespectful character on the late Professor Earle, made by representatives of that type of scholarship which ensures atonement, in the way of similar disrespect to the makers, from other representatives of it, when a fresh phase has come in. The mob before the mast will hardly be echoed by those who speak from the quarter-deck. Mr Earle was a pioneer among Englishmen in the application of comparative study to the sources of English, and he may sometimes have made slips, while he had a certain enthusiasm which was perhaps likely to turn his slip-marks into pitfalls. But the final section on Prosody in his *Philology of the English Tongue*<sup>1</sup> has a quality of its own which will outlast many of the above-mentioned phases. I think he was not only rash but positively incorrect in such a clause as “Since we have adopted the French principles of poetry.” For these are exactly what we have never adopted wholly, and never at all except in a few rather short periods of mistake. But he supplied the proper corrective in an excellent contrast of metre and rhythm, and I know hardly anything better, in this section, than his treatment of what we may call the concerted sound-value of English—the system, and, as far as they can be given, the reasons, of our shiftings of accent and the like. The whole thing is a sort of excursus or by-work to prosody proper, but it is very interesting and very valuable.

So also the references, by a member of a younger Mr Henry Sweet

<sup>1</sup> Oxford, 1871, and frequently reprinted

school of philologists, to metrical matters in Mr Henry Sweet's *History of English Sounds* (originally 1874, but remodelled later) and in his other works—not rare—are nowhere, I think, systematised into a general theory. They start, naturally enough, from the phonetic side, but Mr Sweet, at least, so far as I remember, never falls into the ordinary phonetician's pits, and is perfectly conscious that the poet "lengthens and shortens" sounds at his discretion, though he knows, of course, that this discretion has limits. His familiarity with German writers is probably the main cause of his adopting the objectionable "four-stress" classification, according to which, I suppose (though I hope not according to *him*), "Very-little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese" is a "one-stress" line or section.

Mr Symonds

The extreme of the horn or wing of the prosodist army, opposite to that occupied by the philologists, was represented, in the same year as that of the publication of the original form of Mr Henry Sweet's work, by an essay of Mr J A Symonds's in the *Fortnightly Review*. This, with subsequent additions, became his tractate on *Blank Verse*, published, in accordance with his directions, by his literary executor, Mr Horatio Brown, in 1894-95. Its apparent prosodic anarchism has been, from one point of view not undeservedly, stigmatised by commentators so different in everything but competence as Professor Mayor and Mr Omond, and it has been summed up by others as prosodic "go-as-you-please". You certainly can pick many holes in it. I think I may, after writing these volumes, say that the sentence "Attend strictly to the sense and to the pauses, the lines will then be perfectly melodious, but if you attempt to scan these lines on any preconceived metrical scheme, you will violate the sense and vitiate the metre," is, as he means it,<sup>1</sup> absurd. He had previously said (p. 45) that Webster's

To be executed again, who must despatch me?

is "hard to make a five footed line out of". There is no

<sup>1</sup> If he had meant that you must not force a scheme on the verse, he would, of course, have simply been preaching my own doctrine. But he meant that the verse will not lend itself to any scheme.

more difficulty in doing so, on the system of this book than there is with

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit

Yet, notwithstanding this, and a hundred other mistakes or self-contradictions, due partly to insufficient study of prosodic literature, and partly to impatience of certain notorious errors of earlier prosodists, the tractate is well worth reading, and supplies a most useful corrective to such hard and fast arbitrariness as survives even in *Dr Abbott*. Mr Symonds has the benefit of that great line—

Amare liceat, si potiri non licet,

and if he has not possessed himself of the open secret of English prosody, he has shown that he loved the beauty of English verse

The publication of Mr A J Ellis's *Early English Pronunciation*, which has continually served as a sort of companion to Guest in a different part of the field, began in that same year (1869) which saw so many prosodic treatises, but it was not finished for many years later, and was supplemented by not a few subsidiary papers, in the Philological Society's *Transactions*, for various years in the seventies. Those who like to inquire into "pitch," "force," "weight," and other such things, and to make prosody a branch of acoustics (which no doubt it is, in a way, just as it is in another way a branch of mathematics), will find much to content them here. *This* hungry sheep looks up and is not fed. Mr Ellis made a scheme, in forty-five combinations, of syllabic value, I would as soon admit a scheme of forty-five varieties of beauty in woman. And I am bound to say that I think one criticism of Mr Omond's (who admires Ellis) shatters him. "Analysis of individual bricks does not give us the secret of the arch." But the thrust, though fatal, does not carry its "go-through-someness" as far as it might. Bricks are made in moulds of the same size, and are fairly like each other. I doubt whether any two syllables in the myriad great verses of English poetry



have exactly the same "length," "weight," "pitch," "force," or anything else of the kind<sup>1</sup>

Conway

Mr Gilbert Conway's *Treatise of Versification* (1878) perhaps rather speaks itself by the declaration of its purpose to assist *poets*. I have hinted, in my preface to the second volume of this History, what I think of such a purpose. I should myself as soon think of teaching a rose to group and expand its leaves, or to distil and diffuse its odour, as of teaching a poet to write poetry. His kind, the elder poets, will transmit to him that secret, and God and nature will teach him to use it. But it is perhaps natural that a person who thinks it his duty to make this attempt should make it rather on *a priori* lines. Mr Conway is an uncompromising accent-man, and has gone so far as to work out and enumerate the different possible positions of accent. I think, too, that he has the musical heresy somewhere at the back of his brain. But his book, which has a large number of really learned notes in small print, occupies itself with nothing so much as with *pronunciation*, and, like almost all writers who put this in the foreground of prosody, he makes some very queer statements about it. For instance, he not only thinks that the proper pronunciation of "voyage" is monosyllabic, but, while admitting that Shakespeare and Milton, and even Pope, give the full value, feels difficulty in believing that "any Englishman would have talked of a *voi-yage* [*sic*] as late as 1730." I can only say that one Englishman has never talked of anything else up to as late as 1910, and that he finds difficulty in believing that the pronunciation can fall out of the land so long as any of our good poets are read. To speak plainly, "voy'ge"

<sup>1</sup> A few things of small importance may be gathered in a note, such as some references of Professor Blackie's in his *Hellas Hellenicae*, which are occasionally shrewd, but display the slap-dash, hit-or-miss peculiarities of their author. An article (glanced at above) in the *Christian Remembrancer* for 1866, on Dart's *Iliad*, is lively reading, but scarcely of much value. The writer held that "by the very laws of our accentuation we cannot have a spondee,"—a fresh instance, on the one hand, of the arbitrary promulgation of such laws, on the other—even taking his own view—of the confusion of *words* with *feet*. Indeed arbitrariness and confusion are the two plagues of prosody, and few writers escape both—hardly any, one or the other.

is, at best, a conversational slipshodness or 'a very questionable licence—at worst, a sheer vulgarism.

Many other curious evidences of courageous deduction from arbitrary premises are to be found in Mr Conway. Objecting rightly to "interesting," he allows "int'resting".<sup>1</sup> His remarks on Milton are particularly noteworthy. He thinks that "Milton alone of our poets studied versification" and "copied from a perfect model." This phrase may puzzle the reader, but it seems to refer to Italian. Mr Conway is a great Italianist, and "assumes with confidence that the *right* standard of sonnet is Italian"—he might have told us which of the many. But, for all this, Milton is "not a safe guide" he is "capricious," "inconsistent," and I know not what else. Mr Conway does see the anapæstic tendency in the English hexameter, but he does not perceive its lesson, and his remarks on the famous rhyme of "ecclesiastic" and "a stick" seem to show that he does not possess a sense which is almost as necessary in the region of prosody as anywhere else, but which was equally lacked by Guest. He pronounces it "abnormal and licentious to a degree that nothing can excuse"—except, let us humbly suggest, the not unimportant fact that its licentiousness and its abnormality were exactly what the poet aimed at. And finally, he is, perhaps, the latest writer who has deliberately taken up the principle of the apostrophating extremists, to the length of allowing, or rather insisting on, "am'rous" and 'del'cate".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The advantages of "making a collection" are known in several contexts and senses. Let us make a little one, adjusted to Mr Conway's pronunciation of "voyage," from poetry strictly later than 1730.

The stars arc with the *voyger*  
Wherever he may sail

*Voyaging* through strange seas of thought, alone

and thou,  
Heroic sailor soul,  
Art passing on thy happier *voyge* now

Let it be observed that these are no mere examples of an unlucky single mistake—that mistake is directly connected with the misvaluation and overvaluation of accent.

Mr Ruskin

"Combining information" has sometimes been regarded as a process humorous in conception but hazardous in the carrying out. Yet some knowledge of Mr Ruskin, and some knowledge of prosody, might furnish an antecedent idea of his *Elements of English Prosody*<sup>1</sup> which would not be very far wrong. Eccentricities of nomenclature, we have said, do not go for much, and a merely mild and passing wonder is excited at finding that while a trochee is a "troche" (a form chiefly associated in some minds with the adjective "bronchial") a spondee is a spondeus. Imagination boggles a little at the notion of the "Bridge of Sighs" being written "in double tribrachs, with choreus and anapæst," though "an imperfectly trained reader might think them dactylic." To speak plainly, Mr Ruskin was himself very imperfectly trained in these matters, and his little tractate (which employs musical notation) must have left the students in St George's Schools, for whose use it was composed, with their heads rather in a whirl. But, like Mr Symonds's book, it has the saving grace of love, so the heads may have whirled to some purpose after all, in concert with the world which love makes go round likewise.

Mr Edmund Gurney

Edmund Gurney's two remarkable books, *The Power of Sound* (1880) and *Tertium Quid* (1887), may seem—the one from its very title, and the other from the fact that every prosodist is a *tertius*, not always *gaudens*, to every pair of craftsfellows that he meets—to be bound to have to do with our matter. And they have, but not so much as one might expect. Gurney's interests were for the most part either purely musical or purely literary, and he seems to have made the mistake of thinking that prosody was simply a sort of bridge, or debatable ground, between the two. It was, I think, partly due to him (for he had no small influence) that the singular heresy of its being immaterial whether accent begins or ends a foot has spread so much. And one of his scansion—

By the wat|ers of Ba|bylon we sat down | and wept,

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<sup>1</sup> Orpington, 1880

has become rather famous as a prosodic quoting-stock, and bone of contention between opposite schools. Mr. Omond quite justly thinks it "extraordinary," and that it "reduces the line to prose," but it is approved by a recent American prosodist of ability, Professor Charlton Lewis. I should say that it is not even rhythmical prose—the preferable (though, of course, not the only) scansion there would be

By the waters | of Babylon | we sat down and | wept

As English verse, Gurney's scansion makes it not so much naughty as naught<sup>1</sup>

We come next to two writers of considerable importance. Mr Shadworth H. Hodgson's paper on "English Verse" in *Outcast Essays* (1881) is, like everything of its writer's, worth reading, but it suffers, as do so many of our prosodic documents, from being too occasional. It was apparently written, at least in part, with a view to Guest, and also with an eye on those interesting experiments of Mr. Bridges in "new prosody" which enlivened the late seventies and early eighties, and the originals of which disappeared from my own possession under some influence of *Fortuna maligna*, or perhaps, as in the fairy stories, because I was not worthy of them. I find the tract, however, somewhat confusing in more senses than one. Mr. Hodgson, as always, speaks much of logic—a thing for which I have myself almost unlimited respect. But in one place he says that "metre is not necessary to poetry," in another that it "distinguishes poetry from prose." A *differentia non necessaria*, at any rate *pro tanto*, upsets my notions of the Art of Arts and Science of Sciences. I fancy that some later prosodists are either distinctly indebted to, or were unconsciously anticipated by, this writer. He is for a Cerberus-stress, a triple monster in words and metre and rhetoric. He distinguishes and emphasises "duration," "pitch," "colour," "tone," and "loudness" in sounds. He thinks that "monosyllables have no word-stress," and that

The mighty Corineüs from the sepulchre

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<sup>1</sup> See more on it in Appendix vi.

is not metrical English at all And his arguments are sometimes very strange indeed He is speaking of the *In Memoriam* phrase—

Or that the past will always win  
A glory from its being far,

and observes that Mr. Ruskin says it will “come right” [I do not myself see that what *is* need “come”] if you accent “or” and “be-” Now Mr Hodgson retorts that he cannot accent “be-,” and that the true stress is on “far” “That gives an imaginative picture of the receding past, whereas to lay stress on ‘being’ is to give an argument for the past winning glory—and a bad one, because much of the past is very near” I am bound to say that the words I have italicised appear to me, not only among the most feeble arguments ever uttered by a man of talent, but fatally deficient in sensibility to poetic touch If a man does not know that yesterday is sometimes centuries off, he lacks the power of comprehending anything that is not purely and narrowly intellectual As a matter of fact, “being” is, in the context, susceptible of its noun-value which would alter the case even from Mr Hodgson’s point of view, I suppose But there is not the least difficulty in lengthening the *e* if it is kept as a participle. The paper is of real interest, but the zeal of the House of Stress has eaten up great part of the author’s power of appreciating poetic form and expression

Professor  
Fleeming  
Jenkin

Considerable attention was attracted at the time by certain articles, also based or “pegged” on Guest, which the late Professor Fleeming Jenkin contributed to the *Saturday Review* in the early opening of 1883, and which, after his death, were reprinted in his *Memoir* (1887) They have the character of a great deal of prosodic work in recent times It would be fatuous, as well as uncivil, to call this amateurish, but it certainly has something of that kind about it A man of intellectual tastes, and perhaps of distinct *expertise* in some kind of literature, science, or art, but without a very wide acquaintance with English poetry, and knowing little or nothing of prosodic and

prosodist history, has his interest excited in the subject by this or that accident, and proceeds to formulate a theory. He will very likely make some interesting observations, but he will almost certainly make some decided blunders. Jenkin, like Hodgson, saw not a little of the Guestian impracticabilities, and he admits that Cowper's "Boadicea" becomes ridiculous if you scan it iambically. But Guest's "sections" caught his engineering fancy, and he endeavoured to combine them with foot-scansion, regarding the line as, so to speak, "cross-tied" by the two processes. Section-groups are *not* to have more than five syllables, the normal heroic is to have four to its five feet, but there may be six, seven, or even eight "beats," which must never come on "weak" syllables. It is not necessary to dwell on the arbitrariness and over-individualism of this system. Some general remarks will be given on it, and on others, later. It is sufficient meanwhile to say that Professor Jenkin was intensely interested in the acted drama, and that his whole system is pretty evidently *elocutionary*, while it scarcely applies except to heroics.

I said, in a note to my original Preface, that, had Mr J B Mayor's *Chapters on English Metre*<sup>1</sup> been fuller, I had hardly written this book. The compliment was no empty one, and I repeat it at the end as I uttered it at the beginning. Some objection has been taken to Professor Mayor's omitting mention of "time," and to his exclusive insistence on accent. But I imagine that the omission was simply due to a wise reluctance to be drawn, in a book professedly not exhaustive, into an almost endless controversy, and careful reading will show that, though he allows feet to be based on accent, it is by feet that he goes. Now a man who really goes by feet can never really go by accent, whatever terminology it may seem convenient to him to use. And it may be further observed that all the changes of mind which Professor Mayor announces (his book was made up of earlier papers

Professor  
Mayor

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge, 1886. Revised several times. Also *A Handbook of Modern English Metre* (Cambridge, 1903).

in part, and has been supplemented with others since its first appearance) are in a direction fatal to merely literal and "Capernaite" accentualism. He relinquishes slur for trisyllabic feet, admits tribrachic substitution, etc. Now this cuts the ground from under accentualism and you will scarcely ever meet an accentual stalwart who *really* admits trisyllabic feet—never at all one who definitely admits tribrachs. For these "draw to the dregs of a democracy" his beloved monarchy of accent.

Substantively, the book consists of criticisms on Guest, Abbott, Symonds, Ellis, and others, with later chapters on more general points, and on different kinds of metre. An unsound criticism is very rare, an unsound scansion rarer, and there is no book on the subject which I have been able for the last fifteen years to put into the hands of students with so little of the unsatisfactory caution "Excellent when it is right, but it is pretty often wrong, and you must look out."

The "mono-  
pressure"  
theory

The years 1888 and 1889 are of no small importance in the prosodist calendar. The latter saw the first appearance of Mr Bridges' work on Milton, which we have pretty fully discussed under the special head, but which has gradually been enlarged into something like a treatise of "Stress Prosody" besides allying with itself Mr Stone's theories on the hexameter, of which we spoke in the last chapter. 1888 had seen the appearance of a smaller and more specialised work, which, though not, so far as I know, continued by its author, has been taken up by another and a distinguished hand, and has seemed to some likely to exercise considerable influence on future prosodists. This was a pamphlet ("to be," but never, I think, actually, "continued," and anonymously issued, but attributed to "J. W. Blake") which was published by Messrs Blackwood with the title *Accent and Rhythm explained by the Law of Monopressures*. Some years later Professor Skeat, first in the Introductory matter to his great edition of Chaucer, and afterwards in a Philological Society paper, adopted the principles of this, expanding and applying them.

The principle of the "monopressure" system (somehow or other echoes of "monophysite" and "monothelite"—ancestral voices prophesying war—besiege the affrighted ear of fantastic memory) is purely physical-phonetic "Speech," says the author of the original pamphlet, "is possible only in monopressures," "the air that is supplied for the production of the voice-vibrations being capable of being used only in volumes or jets" Further, these "speech-waves" in English *must* contain a "strong" syllable, and *may* contain weak ones, but, according to Professor Skeat, only one or two of the latter, and only four arrangements of the two—that is to say, strong, weak-strong, strong-weak, and weak-strong-weak If you want *more* you must have more speech-waves (*la portion n'est pas divisible*, as the restaurants say) If you want *others*, apparently you cannot have them at all

The connection with prosody is, of course, obvious, and we are told to congratulate ourselves on getting rid of the "wooden" methods of ordinary prosody, its artificial systems, and so forth Let us see what we have got instead

The results are that—by the "natural" method of scansion, which uses a dot to divide speech-waves instead of a bar—the separate "feet"<sup>1</sup> of a well-known line of Goldsmith run thus, hyphens being used to unify the "speech-feet," as we may call them

The-shéltér'd cót the-cúlú váted fárm

As usual, once more, this result is utterly unsatisfactory to me Any system of prosody, artificial or natural, golden or wooden, which makes the rhythmical division of this line of Goldsmith consist of an amphibrach, a monosyllabic foot, another amphibrach, a trochee, and another monosyllabic, robs it, to my ear, of all rhythm whatsoever, even as prose, and turns it into a helpless

<sup>1</sup> This use and that of the individual terms later is not improper Professor Skeat adopts them with a proviso—to be expected and respected—that the English foot is made up of "strong" and "weak," not "long" and "short," syllables



turmoil of gasp-feet. A result of this kind is not (to use once more an invaluable formula) a result of the nature and quality demanded by this purchaser. Better the utmost "Symondite" anarchy than such obedience to physical laws.

But, putting aside entirely the question whether this monopressure notion is a physical law in reality, let us ask another. Have these physics and phonetics really got anything to do with the matter? Mr Omond has urged part of this objection by very properly remarking that these groups, take them for what they may be worth, are raw material of verse and prose alike. But I have not a little to add to his objection, which, by the way, seems to me to be a very wide-ranging one, and to apply to almost all inquiries into the basis of accent and quantity. In the first place, it must be evident that this system of prosody is inseparably wedded to *accent*—that there is in it, for instance, no place for a tribrach. In the second, and this is to me a still greater objection, its tendency is what I regard as one of the greatest dangers in studying English verse—the tendency to regard words *separately*. In the passage which Professor Skeat scans from Goldsmith, the division of speech-waves is always at a word-end, except in "cultivated," and there it is at the end, though it has to be in the middle likewise. Now I have frequently pointed out that one of the most specific differences of poetry in English is the metrical splitting of words. In ordinary conversation we no doubt, to a certain extent, make our glottis, or our glottis makes us (I do not want to be unnecessarily provocative) emit words singly. Even in more elaborate prose we still have a tendency to make pauses at word-ends, but as this prose becomes rhythmical we divide words more, and in poetry, except in so far as our abundant monosyllables prevent it, we positively avoid, save for special reasons, coincidence of foot- and word-end. I do not pretend (my glottis is dreadfully insubordinate, and has never been trained, like a well-behaved penny-in-the-slot machine, to emit the regular quantity of "butter-scotch")

and nothing more) to know exactly how Mr Blake and Dr Skeat would scan my favourite line—

Our noisy years seem moments in the being,

but I feel almost certain that they would isolate "moments," and that they would not divide "noisy." Now a glottis that would do that seems to me to be not merely what the Chancellor called Richard Carstone, but what Mr Mantalini called the Countess's outline. It is not only "vexatious and capricious," it is "demd," and moreover self-condemned. The scansion of the line of Goldsmith, which is plain sailing, is bad enough, what it makes of Chaucer is worse, but what such a process would do with Shakespeare or Milton, with Tennyson or Swinburne, is too awful to think of.

Since the eighties, however, these fancy prosodies have made considerable and various way. In the *Contemporary Review* for November 1894 there appeared an article on the *Development of English Metres*, by Mr William Larmine, which has, at the time and since, attracted attention. I do not think the writer has ever followed it up, though he has written verse. A poet of the new "Celtic" school, he rather rashly discusses the antiquity of assonance in Irish poetry, and advocates its substitution for rhyme in English, with a sort of go-as-you-please rhythm behind it. He approves and attempts "historical approach," but cannot, I fear, be said to be very well equipped for it. He overrates the significance of blank-verse *rhymelessness* very greatly, seems not to have realised the fact that, after Surrey and before Milton, blank verse itself was practically confined to drama, and has the singular remark that "Spenser took Chaucer as his model and rhymed," as if, between the two, rhymelessness had been the rule, and not the excessively rare exception. He thinks, like Coleridge himself, that the author of *Christabel* was the first to display the capabilities of trisyllabic feet conspicuously, and that "from the mouth of Swinburne the new music first rolls in full flood." In fact Mr Swinburne himself, Irish poetry, and

Mr William  
Larmine

assonance<sup>\*</sup> (which he finds in Homer) practically divide Mr Larminie's attention and admiration. All are worthy of both—especially Mr Swinburne, but the three will scarcely, as treated by this author, suffice for a theory of prosody. And it is quite certain that assonance is ineffective in English, when it is not something worse. It either escapes notice altogether, or forces itself on our ears as a clumsy attempt at unaccomplished rhyme.

Mr J M  
Robertson

One has once more to remark, in reference to the Appendix on "Accent, Quantity, and Feet," in Mr. J M Robertson's *New Essays towards a Critical Method* (1897), that the "occasional" character of so large a proportion of prosodic work is a serious drawback. It is impossible to give a fair conspectus of it without going back, and back, and back to the documents which itself implies and comments—a process of more than Scholastic involution. Mr Robertson mainly comments on Poe and Lanier (*v inf*), with a primary inclination to the former, corrected (or perverted) somewhat by the latter, but with wide expatiation, which is almost always worth following. Here, at any rate, he is often not far from the kingdom of Heaven. And if he goes against "feet," it is chiefly because he wants from them what neither they nor anything else can give him, in the "metaprosodic" way.

MM Van  
Dam and  
Stoffel

Our next subjects, and nearly the last on whom we shall dwell very particularly, are instances of the difficulty in adjusting the claims of frankness and courtesy when criticising criticism by living persons. This difficulty, however, is reduced to a minimum in the first case. Messrs Bastian A P Van Dam and Cornelis Stoffel appear to be two Dutch gentlemen who write English with excellent grammatical command, and who have contributed to our subject, in recent years, one not small book<sup>1</sup> and one very large pamphlet<sup>2</sup>. Even more remarkable than their command of English is their possession of that "undoubting mind" which inspires the possessor with so much con-

<sup>1</sup> *W Shakespeare, Prosody and Text*, etc (London, 1900)

<sup>2</sup> *Chapters on English Printing, Prosody, and Pronunciation* (Heidelberg, 1902)

fidence in his own infallibility, and so complete a conviction that everybody else is wrong. Pinning their faith literally, and as to a statement of fact, not opinion and deduction, on Gascoigne's deliverance as to the two-syllable foot, and supporting themselves further by almost unqualified acceptance of the printed texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Messrs Van Dam and Stoffel have come to the conclusion that editors of Shakespeare have been "ignorant of nearly every rule of prosody," that "none of them has up to now thought it worth while to make a full and close study of Elizabethan prosody." But Shakespearian editors are not the only persons who are told that they know nothing about their native tongue and its poetry. Guest, with whom, from some points of view, one might have thought these Dutch gentlemen likely to be in sympathy, Ellis, who, as they are uncompromisingly philological, might have been supposed likely to attract their respect, and "modern æsthetic critics" are all subjected in common to the fiery rain. Their own theory is almost pure Byssism. "The rhythmical arrangement of syllables" is the sole criterion in poetry: every extra syllable is ruthlessly turned out or explained away. "The interpolation of them would, in the age of Elizabeth, have been certainly looked upon as destructive of the rhythm of this kind of verse." Tennyson's and other modern blank verse is "irregular", and it is clear that Messrs Van Dam and Stoffel are not far from the opinion of the young Eurasian gentleman whom I once knew, and who thought it "just like prose."

Of what they think Shakespeare's verse to have been really like, one example, or rather two which they have themselves combined, will show better than pages of desultory citation and comment. The main text is the undoubtedly curious arrangement of some lines of Isabel's first speech, in the opening scene of the Fourth Act of *Measure for Measure*, which (to run them on uncontentiously in prose) read thus in the Folio

There have I made my promise, upon the heavy middle of the night to call upon him.

This, which is undoubtedly difficult to get into rhythmical blank verse of two lines only, has been manipulated in various fashions, such as—

There have I made my promise to call upon him  
Upon the heavy middle of the night

According to these gentlemen, there are only two ways in which the passage *can* be taken. They have no objection to the actual Folio division—

• There have I made my promise upon the  
Heavy middle of the night to call upon him

(their principles not disallowing "heavy mid-" as a possible foot), or else (which they prefer)—

There have I made my prom'se upon the heav-  
y middle of the night to call upon him,

the same principles not precluding a dissection of Canningian kind. They adduce as a parallel to this last, *Winter's Tale*, V in 140-141.

As I thought, dead, and have in vain said many  
A prayer upon her grave

Now it is not of the first importance, or of any necessity, to settle here what the exact arrangement of Isabel's words ought to be, though (as it may be thought that a historian of prosody should not shun the test) I may say that the "Globe" editors seem to me quite right<sup>1</sup>. But it may be observed, in final dismissal of Messrs. Van Dam and Stoffel's claim to be heard,—first, that the *Winter's Tale* passage is of a totally different rhythm, and not akin in any way, secondly, that any one who can regard either of their admitted solutions as a possible Shakespearian cadence, even at the very earliest date to which *Measure for Measure* can possibly be assigned, must be utterly deaf to Shakespeare's prosody<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> There have I made my promise  
Upon the heavy middle of the night  
To call upon him,

the incomplete, but *pro tanto* regular and metrical, first and third lines being (*v. sup.* in 1-66, and p. 438 of this vol.) quite usual

<sup>2</sup> It *might* be Davenant's or Suckling's

I am afraid that one must go a little further. It is not merely to Shakespeare's prosody that Messrs Van Dam and Stoffel are deaf—they have evidently no ears for English poetry of any kind or time. That incompetence of the foreigner—to which, though reluctantly, I have been obliged more than once to draw attention—has never been more astonishingly and fatally illustrated than here. These authors, as has been said, write English remarkably well. I do not think that there is a positive solecism anywhere in their books. They have read, most creditably, and they have spent immense pains. Nowhere will the student, hungry for those statistics and percentages in which, as I acknowledge (with or without shame) these present volumes are so barren, find more food than in their work. They are not even to be blamed for adopting their own theory, erroneous as that theory may seem to me and others. It has been held by great as well as small men in the past, and it may be held by great as well as small in the future. But these great men, however insensible to the unity and continuity of English verse, have always been, and I think always will be, sensible to its life and the charms of that life *in one or another period*. They may have slighted Chloe's figure because it had not the symmetry of Phyllis, or disparaged Phyllis's features because they were not regular according to Chloe's type, but they loved something, and where they loved they understood.

Messrs Van Dam and Stoffel may love or not, but they certainly do not understand. To them English poetry is not a live thing at all—a thing subject to the chances and changes, the growth and the flourishing and the decay which attend life, and indeed constitute it. It is an enormous sack, full of syllables which you have to fit together in certain numbers on certain wires, splitting your pea when it will not go into the proper place with the proper rattle. It is not necessary to dwell much on their disproportionate and exclusive estimate of Gascoigne and the other Elizabethan critics, because that matter has, I hope, been quite sufficiently dealt with long ago.

It is not necessary even to lay stress on the fact that to "believe in the old printed texts" (their own words) is in such matters almost irrational. The present writer is not much disposed to innovation in anything, and is almost as conservative in his attitude to matters literary as to others, while he is certainly not unread in the original texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it appears to him, in the first place, that it would be a very wonderful thing if texts—printed almost always without revision by their authors, in many cases not from those authors' manuscripts, by persons who were actually as ignorant of "the rules of prosody" as Messrs Van Dam and Stoffel suppose modern editors to be—could be accepted as standards. And, in the second place, he knows, from actual acquaintance, that though indiscriminate tampering with these texts is inexcusable, literal acceptance of them is only possible to a *simplicitas* which is not even *sancta*.

But on such points difference of opinion is possible. On the major appreciations and scansions of these two gentlemen of Holland there can be no compromise, no set-off, no recommendation to mercy. They have simply presumed to give judgment on English poetry without hearing—without, apparently, being able to hear—what English poetry is.

Other foreign  
students of  
English  
prosody  
Dr Schipper

Considerable attention has, in fact, been paid of late years on the Continent to English versification. The bulk of German work on the subject is, of course, very great, though it is, from my point of view, almost universally injured by the German tendency to see all things in stress, and not materially improved by the other German tendency to classify, enumerate, tabulate, and imagine that some solid result has thereby been attained. But I have already paid tribute to the immense and orderly painstaking of Dr Schipper's great work<sup>1</sup>—one of the foundation stones of a prosodic library. And the unwearied industry of the nation has been applied in other instances, though I cannot remember many books or passages that

<sup>1</sup> *Englische Metrik* (Bonn, 1882-89), and a section of Paul's *Grundriss* on the subject.

need special comment. The work of Professor Alois Brandl, and that of Dr Luick, are perhaps the chief exceptions.

In France, too, of late years, accompanying the general tendency to study English literature of which the regretted M Beljame was one of the pioneer examples, there have been treatments, contrasting curiously with Boileau's alleged inquiries whether there were any English poets, and with the complacent conclusion of Callières that only Frenchmen, Spaniards, and Italians should write in their own tongues, while the other barbarians had better employ Latin. Here also, however, there are drawbacks. Naturally enough, as the Germans are prone to exaggerate the accentual and "irregular" element in English—their own side—so the French try to introduce syllabic regularity, or to rely on mere general rhythm. Converting rather than reversing a famous saying, they understand the spirit to which they are like, and that only.

As early as 1886 M. J. Mothéré, in a pamphlet entitled *Quelques mots sur les théories du vers héroïque anglais*, set the fashion (which some English writers have most curiously followed) of regarding Chaucer's verse as directly and in detail based on French contemporaries. But the chief recent writers on the subject have been M Verrier and M Walter Thomas. The first named, a good many M Verrier years ago (1893) wrote in French a *Primer of English Versification*, and has very recently issued a large and elaborate system of it<sup>1</sup>. With that system I do not agree, and the earlier primer is too much adjusted to French and "modern" points of view. There M Verrier would not use classical terms, and was a stress-and-rhythm man to the nth. But it is noticeable that his "irregularities" take in most of the important things—trissyllabic feet, pause-syllables, etc. One might have hoped from this that, some

<sup>1</sup> *Essai sur les principes de la métrique anglaise*, three vols., Paris, 1909. Of these I have carefully studied vols. 1 and 2—*Métrique auditive* and *Théorie générale du rythme*. The third, though announced as ready, was not obtainable either when I wrote the text or when I revised my proofs. It, however, appears only to contain results of phonetic experiment, which could, in my view, be nothing but curiosities.



day, he would have come to perceive that these things, which he did see, are just as "regular" as the others. But he has, it seems, turned to physics and phonographs. Such inquiries as these can, as it seems to me, have nothing, or next to nothing, to do with those on which we are engaged. They cannot affect the constitution of the different feet, for on most stress and stress-interval systems, as we have seen, iambs are as trochees, and anapæsts as dactyls, if not all four as one. With rhyme they have evidently nothing to do. With alliteration, vowel-music, and other things of the kind, nothing. From the arrangement of definite and different metres, which forms the greater and most delightful part of the study of prosody, they stand so far back as to be little more connected with it than with sheer prose, or with the disjointed chat of a couple of goodies. They can deal with raw material only, and my customs take no account of raw material.

The task which M. Verrier has undertaken in his large book is a bold and interesting one, for it is simply to tell English prosodists of *all* schools (with only an exception, and that partial, in favour of musical and metronomical specialists like Mr. Thomson) that they know nothing about their business, their poetry, and their language<sup>1</sup>. It seems that "la scansion traditionnelle fait des vers anglais une marqueterie de morceaux disparates, choisis comme au hasard et assemblés sans principe". Those who dwell in this chaos must naturally be glad to see the advent of order, but whether they will exactly find it in M. Verrier remains to be seen. I fear I for one can answer in the negative, but if M. Verrier should ever cast eyes on this book he will not be surprised at that.

His own new doctrine is announced as briefly this, that in our poetry "Le Rhythme n'y est constitué que par la coïncidence de l'accent avec le temps marqué" [*ictus*] "il est constitué par le retour du temps marqué à intervalles sensiblement égaux". Perhaps some

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MM. Van Dam and Stoffel, also cf. *Martin Chuzzlewit*, as regards the inferiority of the knowledge of Britishers on other points connected with their own institutions.

persons will be disappointed at this, which, after all, comes to little more than saying that English rhythm is rhythmical, a proposition which I at least am far from denying. The terms of the definition are not particularly objectionable, but certainly not novel, though it would suit the terminology of accentualists in one way, and that of "isochronous intervalists" in another. In short, M Verrier is a musical and phonetical stress-prosodist of a special type, and nothing more or newer. His differentia, such as it is, consists in the fact that by far the larger part of his book—the whole of the third volume and most of the first two—is occupied by previous questions, phonetic and in the wide sense phonological, which will go with any system of prosody, and by records of experiment, which perhaps can establish none.

His mediate processes, however, are very doubtful, and his results sometimes, and indeed often, definitely and demonstrably erroneous. Nor is this to be wondered at when the secret of his mistakes reveals itself, as it is sure to do to any patient and unprejudiced reader, though the multitude of details may hide it for a time. M Verrier prides himself on "analysing" English verse, but his method of analysis is, to say the least, peculiar. The only fashion of analysis, as such, which can ever be satisfactory, is to take the line as a whole, to read it, with the right English pronunciation and with expression of extra-poetical as well as poetical character, in connection with its neighbours, and to see into what rhythmical modes it falls most naturally. When you have done this for a long period of time, on a sufficiently large number of instances selected indifferently over the whole course of English poetry, you will be qualified to say what these modes are, whether they can be classified, and what are their principles of arrangement. M Verrier's proceeding is quite different. He "begins at the beginning," but in a novel fashion, looking at the beginning *only* for the nonce, and deciding, on some phonetic principle or other, what that beginning is. Then, having nailed this poor thing to the operating board, without regard to the spasms of the

rest, he goes to the end and nails that down too. Then, and only then, he proceeds to inspect the quivering middle, and see what he can make of that. Whether such a proceeding could anyhow come to good is a question which may be left to the reader. I should say myself that even the Procrustean methods of the Bysshes were not so fatal. But it certainly does not. As with all musical prosodists, "anacrusis," in an immense extension of the term, figures everywhere, M. Verrier's use extending to "sectional" employment of it. Like most of his fellows, he confounds iambic and trochaic rhythm, repeatedly asserting that

Then methought I heard a hollow sound

has *exactly* the same rhythm as

Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen

That he also sometimes, and even not seldom, comes right, agreeing with the chaotic "marquetrists" in scansion, is not surprising. After all, his "F, f," *forte* and *faible*, for "long" and "short," represent the difference better than "accented" and "unaccented," though not so well as "long" and "short" themselves, especially as M. Verrier admits "time." His "groupes rythmiques" are sometimes actual feet, and almost always might be. His "suppression of anacrusis" and "trissyllabic variation" in these "groups" are only infinitely clumsier and more arbitrary ways of describing what, when it is described in plain foot-terms, he calls a "marquetry of irreconcilable fragments." The worst of it is that, where he is not erroneous, he is generally superfluous, and that, where he is not superfluous, he is almost always wrong.

Nor is the cause of his error far to seek, though it will perhaps only display itself fully after careful reading. The book seems to have been originally planned almost as a direct polemic against the late M. Alexandre Beljame, who, as is well known, edited and scanned *Enoch Arden*, *Macbeth*, and other English poetry on a system perhaps a little

meticulous,<sup>1</sup> but with generally sound results. Now I am going on delicate but necessary ground when I say that, not having the pleasure of M. Verrier's personal acquaintance, I cannot tell what his acquaintance with spoken English may be. He seems dangerously prone to take it from the phoneticians, who are frequently deaf, though unfortunately not dumb, guides. But M. Beljame, whom I *did* know, had, without exception, or with the exception only of the present French Ambassador at Washington, the most perfect English pronunciation and intonation that I ever heard from French lips. He had, therefore, the wedding garment, the qualification, the *sine qua non*. Has M. Verrier? I can only say that his scansion frequently suggest to me that he has not, and that one or two passages and arguments of his book confirm the suggestion fatally. As a careful student of phonetics he knows the pitfall, but does he know when he has fallen into it? For instance, he tells us that the first English verse that seemed to him really to *be* verse was Byron's "The Assyrian came down," because it was like a certain value of the French Alexandrine. English Alexandrines, he says, "*ne lui disaient rien*." Now all of us who have some slight knowledge of French prosody, and of French elocution, are aware that the French Alexandrine very frequently, in the mouths of French actors and reciters, becomes a four-foot anapæstic line. But Byron's line is not an English Alexandrine, and has no relation to an English Alexandrine whatever, except in the purely accidental fact of its containing twelve<sup>2</sup> syllables. Is M. Verrier sure that he has *quite* purged his ears of this hearing, or not hearing, English verse according as it approaches French standards?

I fear he has not, from almost his opening arguments. At page four of his Introduction he scoffs at M. Beljame's scansion of

P'hilip | the sligh|ed sui|tor of | old times

<sup>1</sup> M. Beljame used *three* values, 0, 1, 2, for short, medium, and long syllables.

<sup>2</sup> Merging "-ian" into one

into the 'five dissyllabic feet of which it undoubtedly consists. To M Verrier this is "an allowance, in the same verse, of feet not merely different but irreconcilable." Of course to an English ear they are not irreconcilable, but simply "Our Mr Iamb" and "Our Mr Trochee" of the same great firm—persons who can sign for each other, and discharge each other's functions without the slightest hitch, to the extent and in the terms of the partnership. But M Verrier, strangely, appeals to *French* ears. He admits regular syllabic scansion in some French octosyllables, but asks the question, "Imposerons-nous cette scansion à tous?" And he produces a distich of Hugo, which, it seems, it would be "ridiculous" to scan dissyllabically like this:

Plus loin | que les | vastes | forêts  
Je fui|rais, je | courais, | j'irais

Now this, with its inevitable bearing, is so obvious a fallacy that it vitiates the entire book, for all its patient observation and all its curious learning. Perhaps it is as absurd to a French ear. But how can the absurdity of a French scansion of a French verse prove anything whatever about an English one? What law can a French ear give to an English tongue, or *vice versa*?

I hope that there is nothing in the above remarks to disqualify me for the appellation of *galant homme* which M Verrier deservedly gives to Mr Omond. His evident interest in English poetry, and his wide study of it, could not but appeal to one who, like myself, has spent a lifetime in reading and enjoying French poetry. But I have at least learnt, from my double study, to keep the prosodies rigorously apart, and I do not think that M Verrier has learnt this lesson quite sufficiently.

On the other hand, M Walter Thomas (who seems to write English excellently) contributed to the *Modern Language Review* for 1907 and 1908 two interesting articles, a single sentence from which will perhaps dispense me from saying much about them. He believes, and has endeavoured to prove, that "Milton's blank metre always

contains ten counted syllables, and ten only" \* *Negatur*, the proofs of the negation have been given, as well as I could give them, at great length in the proper place, and there is no more to be said. Only it must be observed as a little curious that M. Thomas regards his theory as strictly *historic*, and others (such as, no doubt, my own, to which he had no opportunity of referring) as based on twentieth-century pronunciation. Alas! I learnt to pronounce English a good deal before the twentieth century, and I regard my own view as historic or nothing. M. Thomas has failed, I think, to allow for historic *development*, as well as for many other things, when he thinks the English decasyllable to have been carried down unaltered, from Frenchmen and Italians, through Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, to Milton<sup>1</sup>.

Lastly have to be mentioned some English writers of very recent date whom, for reasons already assigned, I do not think it desirable to review in much detail. I think I may say that almost every controversial point in their work is met, by implication, at one or another part of this book, especially in the Appendices of the first volume and of this present. In 1894 Mr J. H. Hallard, Mr Hallard, introducing his translation of Theocritus, showed himself one of the few who have perceived the "anapaestic suck" of the English hexameter, though not as one who quite understood its lesson. In the same year Mr H. D. Bateson, Mr Bateson, printed, in the *Manchester Quarterly*, a paper on the "Rhythm of Coleridge's *Christabel*," which he had anticipated three years earlier with another on "English Rhythms" generally. I have had some correspondence with Mr. Bateson, and I think there is not much important difference between us now, though he was led away by Guest for a time. I hope he will continue his prosodic inquiries.

On the other hand, I fear there is not the slightest chance of my ever making a concordat with Mr William Thomson, Mr William Thomson.

<sup>1</sup> To these should perhaps be added a very able and scholarly comparison of English and French versification, written in French, but by a countryman of our own, Mr F. B. Rudmose Brown (Grenoble, 1905).

Thomson,<sup>1</sup> who would indeed, I imagine, insist on white sheet and neck-rope, if he were even contented with this That Mr Thomson uses musical symbols and notation throughout would be almost enough That he thinks he can arrive at metrical conclusions by a sort of Shamanistic process of "tapping" discourages me further<sup>2</sup> At times, through all these veils, I see something with which I think I might agree, but a sentence close to the end of his pamphlet shows me that it is hopeless "The terms iamb and anapæst, as descriptive of feet, are impossible, since they only confuse what is already covered by trochee and dactyl" Here we come to a true Shibboleth I can imagine, though I think it superfluous, the prosody of the tuning-fork and the laryngoscope, of the metronome and the tapometer, being used on reasonable principles<sup>3</sup> But if anybody thinks that a trochee or a dactyl is not merely, in certain cases, capable of substitution for, but actually "covers what" is meant by, iamb and anapæst, then it is clear that he and I are speaking of two different things, and that there is a gulf between us which neither can cross

One of the most curious, and one of the most disastrous, results of "beatmanship" with which I am acquainted was exemplified in an article<sup>4</sup> by a writer whom I mention wholly for the sake of honour, though I disagree with him here *à outrance*, Mr C F Keary Mr Keary thinks that, in blank verse, it is only stressed words that count, one before the cæsure, and one generally, but not quite always, at the end of the line, while he thinks that in Puck's lines (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II ii 65-69)—

Through the forest have I gone,  
But Athemian found I none,

<sup>1</sup> *The Basis of English Rhythm* (Glasgow, 1904)

<sup>2</sup> If the tap coincides with the ear we don't want it, if it doesn't it is wrong

<sup>3</sup> I have long wondered why no one has applied the sphygmograph to prosody A pulse record of sympathetic reciters, or even readers, of Shakespeare, Shelley, Swinburne, would be much more interesting than most of these things

<sup>4</sup> *Fortnightly Review*, November 1906 "Some Thoughts on the Technique of Poetry"

On whose *eyes* I might *approve*       •  
This flower's *force* in stirring *love*,

the stressed words "give an almost perfect skeleton of stanza"

All this I do most powerfully and potently disbelieve. Even in the octosyllables, where a comparatively large proportion of the words *must* be stressed, this system of alternate mouthing and muttering, this disjunct and meaningless clatter of cryptographic syllables, is bad enough. "Forest," "gone," "Athenian," "none," "eyes," "approve," "force," "love" — this (in a double sense) jingle-fashion of poetic speech is to me utterly repellent. But in blank verse (and I suppose the process would be extended to couplets) the result is much worse. Here you have, almost literally realised, that process of staggering from post to post which was imaged in the foregoing volume. Worse still, it tends to subject English poetry — the great glory of which is the continuous though infinitely varied music of its tenor, its "*linked* sweetness" — to the more spasmodic emphasis of French. Everybody knows how French spoken verse is apt to grate on an English ear, precisely because of this alternation of extravagantly emphasised syllables with gabbled and gobbled ones.

One final and fresh example of this curious stress-fancy, Mr Hewlett and I have done, save for general remarks. As I was revising and completing this chapter, a brilliant writer of prose fiction issued a book of verse. The greater part of it was in ordinary measures, but there were three or four experiments. On these the author made this note: "The intended musical effect can only be got by reading them as if they were written in prose. The natural stresses will then fall into their places in the scheme." Now it must strike most readers, I should suppose, that this is an odd saying. For if you read a thing as prose, and its intended stresses fall naturally into their place, it will surely go hard but the thing *is* prose. And there seems to be a double perversity, first in wasting paper, and thickness of binding, by printing it as verse, and then in interposing unnecessary obstacles in the way



of the reader's reading it as he is intended to do. But this is *a priori*. Let the reader get and read Mr Maurice Hewlett's *Artemision*—it will not be a painful process—and he will find, after reading the examples, that they have a rhythm which is not prose, and that they obey the ordinary laws of verse, *except when they are prose*, and have no business with their companions save to make a *satura* of the two.

Remarks on  
"Fancy"  
prosodies

If, once more, I seem to have taken too light a view of some of these worthy inquirers, let me repair it here by a serious, and, I think, a fairly novel, consideration of some points that affect them generally. There is a principle, or rather an *anti-principle*, a common heterodoxy or fallacy, underlying, as it seems to me, a large number of apparently independent and even opposed systems—the stress-exaggeration of Hodgson and Lewis<sup>1</sup> (different but connected), the fancy sections, to which the same epithets apply, of Price<sup>1</sup> and Jenkin, the go-as-you-please prosody of Symonds, the thought-rhythms and attention-stresses of Liddell,<sup>1</sup> and many others. Historically, and as matter of direct (though often unconscious) suggestion, most of these things started, I think, from Guest (chiefly in the reprint of him), and they must lie heavy on his soul, even though some of them were, no doubt, intentionally corrections of, or revolts from, him. Logically, they have a different origin, or rather there is another influence which must be taken into account with regard to them. They appear to me to be, without exception, results of the confusion of prosody *proper*—the prosody of which an attempt has been made to give an account in this book—with two different phases of what I have called *metaprosody*, both lying *beyond* the strict province of the subject, but one coming in strictness before, the other altogether after it. The one is the, I believe, hopeless quest of the constituents of what I call "quantity," *i.e.* the contrast of syllabic value which produces rhythm and (when regularised) metre. The other cannot be so definitely described, but includes all

<sup>1</sup> See next chapter

the individual technique of the poet (which I have sometimes called "fingering") and a good deal besides. That this is individual, that it cannot be generalised, and that the attempt to make a "science" out of it is as rational as the attempt to make one out of a vast collection of measurements in the possession of a famous tailor<sup>1</sup>—men do not and will not see. And, not seeing it, they miss also, or scornfully pass over and refuse to recognise, the clear universal principles which govern the province of English versification itself, which start from the ready-given stuff of "long" and "short", which relinquish their own work to the poet for his final touches of phrasing, valuing, fingering, and what not, but which are clearly perceptible after this, to which the whole can always be reduced, and without which that whole can never be really and satisfactorily understood. These principles, putting them in concrete form, are the foot, the line, and the stanza or paragraph, but, above all, the foot, the ground at once of stability and motion, the secret and *idea* of English prosody, the be-all, if not the end-all, of English verse.

I myself recognise, of course, that these systems—inadequate, fallacious, mischievous as they often seem to me—have another excuse of origin, just as the inadequate prosodic theories of the late sixteenth, the seventeenth, and the eighteenth centuries had. They are a revolt from these, as these were from the doggerel—the no-system-at-all—of the fifteenth and early sixteenth. It was the terror of this that drove Gascoigne and all his followers—the unconscious prolongation of that terror that drove Bysshe and Johnson—into their theories of the exclusive iambus, of the strict decasyllable, of the "pure" alternate-accent line, of "elision," and "apostrophation," and the rest. And it was the revolt, in various directions and under several flags, from this codification of tick-tack and jog-trot and sing-song (with its foolish

<sup>1</sup> I had at first written "lasts" and "bootmaker", but as I should certainly have been charged with a pun on "feet," which I do not intend, I have altered the image into one not quite so appropriate.

nineteenth-century progeny of *xa* and the rest) that determined<sup>1</sup> the anarchy, tempered by crotchet, of not unlettered men of science like Jenkin, and not unpoetical scholars like Symonds. But the old infallible test of the fruits applies here also. No system can be, or come to, any good—no system can be a system of English verse at all—which suggests from two to eight “stresses”—put on that word what *distress* you will—in an English “heroic” line. No system can be, or come to, any good—no system can be a system of English verse at all—which substitutes the merely logical or merely rhetorical apportionments of prose for those of metre, or which lays it down that hop and skip and jump, glide and lurch, rush and stagger, matter nothing, and are not worth dwelling upon, so long as you get to the end of a line or a paragraph somehow. “He can’t be right who scans his verses wrong.”

On the other hand, I am not concerned to deny that not a few of the speculations of these writers, if they are taken merely as facultative superstructure on a wide basis of foot-prosody, may be harmless—may be positively useful. The intelligent reader will have seen some attempts of the kind in these volumes—if space had allowed there would have been many more. In addition to the general prosody of English, it may almost be said that every poet, not hopelessly “minor,” has a special prosody<sup>2</sup> of his own, and, what is more, that every distinctive metre has a prosody of *its* own. And some attempts have been also made in these directions here. But, to be of any value, they must be based on the general analysis of the line itself, and this, after lifelong experience and experiment, after starting without committal to any previous theory, and taking English poetry as the only guide to English poetic, I believe—I might almost say I know—to be attainable *only* by the system of foot-division, with equivalence and substitution of feet. When you have clearly perceived this, and learnt to

<sup>1</sup> Assisted, of course, beforehand, by the free *practice* of nineteenth century poets from Coleridge to Tennyson.

<sup>2</sup> *Not* in the sense of the German or Germanising “enumerators.”

apply the "leaden rule" to the line itself and to its constitution by feet, you may, *if you like*, extend your research into the backward and forward Beyond. I do not think the backward exploration, into the constituency of the constituents, will profit you much: you may think differently. The forward will certainly profit you if you keep the main theory in view, but not otherwise, and most certainly not if you let it obscure that main theory. Jargon, will-worship, that Delilah "the subject," music, mathematics, a thousand other things will beset the pilgrim, and it will go hard but his bones will whiten by the wayside with those of the worthy but misled folk of whom we have spoken.

Perhaps a still further cause of the rise of these "fancy prosodies" is the undoubted fact that *various* scansion of the same line and piece present themselves. I hope I may be excused for a certain feeling of amusement at the remarks which have (in very few, but a few, cases) been made on my own admissions in this respect. It seems to suggest itself to some persons that there can be only one *via salutis* in these cases, and that the admission of several vitiates the system. It would be as reasonable to say that the possibility of splitting up any but a prime number (or a prime number itself if you allow fractions), in different ways, is an argument against arithmetic. But this peculiarity of prosody has induced some other able students of the subject to argue for a sort of antinomy or antimachy of accent and quantity, of thought-movements and rhythm, of language and verse, etc., which, I confess, appears to me doubtful at the best,<sup>1</sup> and quite incapable of systematisation. Let us again take a vile corpuscle of botched-up verse to experiment upon

King ' thou art old ,  
Thy tale is told ,  
Stale is each Mate—  
Thus saith thy Fate

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<sup>1</sup> I would admit an occasional "contrast" for special purposes, but hardly ever, or never, a "conflict."

Here there is no doubt about the general scansion it is iambic, or anapæstic, monometer, cut as low as possible in syllabic allowance. But in every line except the second, and less certainly the fourth, there is a choice, half prosodic and half rhetorical, between dissyllabic feet everywhere, and strong monosyllabic ones to lead off, with anapæsts to follow. The fact of this is probably obscured to many people by the inveterate incapacity to appreciate the ubiquity of *commonness* in English. "Thou" and "saith" will be long or short as you wish them, by various laws or licences, "is" will be short or long. If you read "grows" for "is" before "each" you will get a fresh variation—spōndæic this time, but equivalent. In other words, the syllables will accommodate themselves to different feet, *but the general metrical value and the system of foot-measurement will remain*. Only what may be called the rhetorical-prosodic part of the matter is to a certain extent arbitrary, and the arbitrariness here will practically defy all attempts to systematise it, as well as all attempts to refer to hard and fast rules the condition of syllabic value which, as it varies, brings about the various relations and collocations of the constituents of metre.

If there seem to any one to be pusillanimity in thus relinquishing to the unknown a province on either side of the province of prosody itself, I fear I must acknowledge myself content to underlie the reproach, and shameless enough rather to glory in it. For it is only by defining your genus first, and then keeping strictly within the definition, that any solid and satisfactory knowledge is possible. Within the range I have indicated, I believe that I can explain, on a rational system, all the formal characteristics of English poetry, and as to further explanation, I am a complete agnostic.

Nor (it should be almost unnecessary to say it, but in literary as in other war-time no precautions can safely be omitted) has any unfavourable reference that I have made to *musical* prosodies involved the slightest disrespect to the great, ancient, and delightful Art of Music itself. I

feel sure that the Muse, or Muses, of Music would not object to anything that I have said and I venture to doubt whether any great composer or executant would ever dream of obtruding his art into an alien province. It is the amateurs and the *dilettanti* who do this. The two main reasons why I have spoken disrespectfully (for I admit and I maintain the disrespect) of musical *prosody* are as follows —The first is, that—without, I think, a single exception—the fruits of it are bad, and the scansion, as far as they allow themselves to be comprehended in prosodic terms at all, prosodically wrong. The second is the hopeless disagreement of the exponents. Music, I have always understood, is a science as well as an art, and its symbolic terminology is scientifically arranged. Yet, to take a single instance, and almost the latest, Mr William Thomson declares that Lanier<sup>1</sup> (of whom, notwithstanding, he thinks highly) “allows his practice to go right in the teeth of his theory”, that Chapman’s<sup>2</sup> notation is “obsolete”, that Miss Dabney’s<sup>1</sup> “never existed”, that Professor Liddell’s<sup>1</sup> “fortunately” few examples of it are “wholly irrational collections of symbols”, that Mr Ruskin is here “absolutely beyond comprehension”. He may be right or he may be wrong—each of the persons he censures may be wrong or he may be right. But one thing is clear, that the use of musical notation ensures no kind of common ground for the users—that they are as much at loggerheads as accent-men and quantity-men, as those who stress and those who foot it. Take this, and take the almost universal and absolutely damning confusion of “backward” and “forward”—or, to translate the terms intelligibly, iambic and trochaic—scansion as identical, and you have almost sufficient reasons for requesting musical prosody to stand down. Indeed the plain man

<sup>1</sup> See next chapter

<sup>2</sup> Not the poet, but a Rev James Chapman who, in 1818 and 1821, published two books, *The Music of Language* and a *Rhythmical Grammar of English*. He will be found duly noticed by Mr Omond, who, however, admits his “wholesale plagiarism” from Steele and Thelwall. Now, I do not love plagiarism—real plagiarism, that is to say—of this kind. But a person who plagiarises such stuff as Steele’s and Thelwall’s “steals trash” with a vengeance, and is doubly to be extruded.

need hardly go so far. If he will remember the enormities of the usual "set" song—the positive minority, and a very small minority too, of instances in which setting does not take liberties with the prosody—he will be satisfied that music is no safe guide here.

But there is also another direction in which we must look. I must reiterate excuse if I have seemed heedless or impertinent in my refusal seriously to consider works on prosody which are based upon "sound-lore." Impertinence would be a sin towards my authors, heedlessness one towards my readers, both, as well as ignorance, sins towards myself also, which I should be very sorry to commit. The truth is, that I do, after giving my best consideration to the matter, solemnly believe and profess that there is no help in Helmholtz for us, and that Ellis is a rotten reed. Phonology, or phonetics, and prosody may seem to have an intimate connection: they are certainly within *speaking* distance of each other, but so were Abraham and Dives. It is possible that the principles of this science or sciences—I wish their exponents were a little more at one about them and about their results—may have had, at some remote period in the order of our creation, something to do with the raw material of prosody. But, by the time that prosody proper—that is to say, the actual art of arrangement of actual poetry—comes into existence, these relations are practically "away in de Ewigkeit." I have never found one single instance in which they have been applied, by one single professor of them, in such a way as to throw the smallest light on the constitution, or to afford the faintest assistance in comprehending the construction and appreciating the beauty, of a line of Shakespeare or of Shelley. I have seen innumerable instances in which they seem to have got in the way of such comprehension and appreciation. In particular, phonetic and phonological methods seem to have assisted and stimulated the syllable-system and the stress-system in the capital enormity, which both share, of considering single sounds and not sound-combinations, and in another crime which is not confined to them, but can be (though

it never ought to be) committed by the foot-system itself—that of disregard of individual fingering by the poet. That “vowel sounds of the same pitch have different harmonics present” is, I believe, an orthodox statement. I should be prepared to accept it without authority and without apparatus. But it does not get me one-millionth of an inch forwarder in comprehending, or in appreciating, the prosodic magnificence of Prospero’s dismissal sentence, or of the last words of Cleopatra.



## CHAPTER V

### AMERICAN POETS AND PROSODISTS

Necessary selection—Bryant—"Maria del Occidente"—Holmes—  
Lowell—Leland—Emerson—Poe—His verse—His *Rationale  
of Verse*—Longfellow—Whitman—Rush—Lanier—Dr Price  
—Professor Gummere—Miss Julia Dabney—Professor Liddell  
—Professor Lewis—Others

Necessary  
selection

THE wisdom of the serpent would perhaps dictate, as the least of two evils, the omission of this chapter altogether, seeing that insufficient notice is apt to give more offence than total neglect. But I hope I am, though perhaps a little, not much more of a "serpent" than Mr Winkle was, and while I cannot attempt to give a thorough conspectus, even from the prosodic point of view, of the abundant verse-production of the English-speaking Occident, it would be not so much offensive as ridiculous to pass over, *sub silentio*, a department of our subject which contains, to mention here three things only, the astonishing poetic and prosodic originality of Poe, the epoch-making attempt of Whitman at poetry without metre, and the most influential, if not the most felicitous, of all attempts at English hexameters, which was made by Longfellow. The fact that this last *had* to be brought in, that the chapter on the subject would have been ludicrously incomplete without him, still more necessitates the inclusion of the other two. Moreover, in recent days, the United States have contributed very largely indeed to the study of prosody. I shall do what I can, neglecting the consequences as boldly as nobler folk, who do what they ought, are advised to neglect them.

I am not concerned to dispute the contention of some American writers that the earlier efforts<sup>1</sup> of the American Muse have been too cavalierly treated. But I shall hardly be expected to sift them minutely here, especially as there is not, and could hardly be, anything strikingly novel in form to be found in them—so far as my not absolutely rudimentary knowledge of them goes. I had often remarked with interest the prosodic correctness, in the best sense, of Bryant, before, quite recently, I was surprised to find that as early as 1819, and in a paper which is thought to have been written some six years earlier still (which would bring it before the publication of *Christabel*), he had, in the *North American Review*, deliberately contended for trisyllabic feet in iambic verse. The almost unerring, though sometimes a little ultra-catholic, taste of Southey had made me familiar from childhood with this beautiful passage in the *Zophiel*<sup>2</sup> of the lady who called herself "Maria del Occidente," but whom men called Mrs Brooks.

And as the dove to far Palmyra flying,  
From where her native founts of Antioch beam,  
Weary, exhausted, longing, panting, sighing,  
Lights sadly at the desert's bitter stream—

So many a soul o'er life's drear desert faring,  
Love's pure congenial spring unfound—unquaffed,—  
Suffers, recoils, then thirsty and despairing  
Of what it would, descends and sips the nearest draught

But there is nothing equal even to the last stanza, itself not the equal of the first, in the rest of the poem. It is, in fact, a pure prosodic windfall, arising from the adoption of redundant syllables and double rhymes, which the lady (though a rather bold experimenter, as her *Alexandrine* in the text shows, and as is also shown by the constant extension of her quatrain to five, six, or even seven lines) rarely tried elsewhere, and never successfully.

<sup>1</sup> I have unluckily not yet seen Professor Otis's *American Verse* (1625-1807) (New York, 1910), the first thorough dealing with this.

<sup>2</sup> *Zophiel, or the Bride of Seven* (London, 1833). As few people are likely to follow me through it, I may say that the passage is in Canto VI, not far from the beginning (p. 230 of *ed. cit.*).

Holmes

Holmes (in whose miscellaneous essays an interesting but mainly physiological paper<sup>1</sup> on abstract prosody will be found) is known to everybody as one of the deftest of verse-smiths. He certainly practised before Mr Locker, whether he invented it or not, the admirable tragi-comic stanza-form, which brought him<sup>2</sup> one of the most exquisite things of the kind to be found in English

The mossy marbles rest  
On the lips that he has pressed  
In their bloom,  
And the names he loved to hear  
Have been carved for many a year  
On the tomb

Lowell

The varied skill of Mr Lowell in all manner of measures, serious and comic, is matter of common knowledge. Although the *Biglow Papers* might not have been written quite as they are if "Ingoldsby" had remained bodiless and in the gloom, they could not show a more thorough command of verse than they do. And nobody practised light verse that is not mere *burlesque*—though it may have burlesque quality—more fascinatingly than Charles Godfrey Leland, from the days when *der Breitmann* "came down to the sea," and those when, after stormy experiences, he meditated on "de infinite blue," to the less cheerful period when "'Twas time for us to go"

Leland

There are many others, but for our purpose I think it will be both permissible and advisable to confine ourselves (with one addition) to the three mentioned above for practice (and in one case for theory also), and to append a selection of the most noticeable prosodic studies which belong to theory only

Emerson

The "addition" may, at any rate this side the water, be a surprise. Few people may have been accustomed to

<sup>1</sup> It is actually entitled "The Physiology of Versification," and seems to me (though I am quite a child at these things) to have anticipated the "monopressurists" by its doctrines of "respiratory pauses" and "natural respiratory rhythm," etc.

<sup>2</sup> In the poem of "The Last Leaf." It may be well to mention that this, and an excellent further selection of the light verse which, as we have pointed out, is specially important for prosodic study, will be found in Professor Brander Matthews' *American Familiar Verse* (New York and London, 1904)

think of Emerson<sup>1</sup> in this particular light, but I have always myself seen him in it. The peculiar octosyllabic couplets of which he was so fond, though rough in appearance, are very characteristic, his mixture of iambs and trochees (as in "Rhea") is sometimes quite effective, as is that of varied metres in "Monadnoc." His very short lines ("Give all to Love," etc) are not τοῦ τυχόντος, and I have seldom read a worse criticism than that of Thoreau<sup>2</sup> on the "Ode to Beauty," that it "slopes too quickly to the rhyme." You may "slope" as quickly as you like, though you may not stagger. But perhaps one of the most interesting things that I have found, in recent re-readings of the author of the famous "long measure" of "Brahma," is the suggestion, in a considerable number of poems, of the Whitmanian rhythmized prose. You will find passages in "Monadnoc," in "Blight," in the "Ode to Channing," and in many others, which tend to prose, just as we shall find the actual Whitmanic tending to verse. How easily this might be Whitman's own

I take him up my ragged sides  
Half-repentant, scant of breath

It depends entirely on what follows and precedes in which harmony you read it. Here again are three decasyllables, quite good as such

For I am weary of the surfaces,  
And die of inanition. If I knew  
Only the herbs and simples of the wood—

which make two perfect Whitmanic lines—

For I am weary of the surfaces, and die of inanition  
If I knew only the herbs and simples of the wood—

with an actual catalogue of these following

Many years ago, when I was endeavouring to make Poe

<sup>1</sup> For myself I have always thought that if Emerson could have dismissed certain things (especially Emerson) from his mind, and let others flow naturally into it, he might have been a very considerable poet. For he had, as I try to point out above, distinct prosodic quality, and he had also many germs of poetic phrase.

<sup>2</sup> I only ask for information: but *was* there ever a more overrated person than Thoreau?

my way in literature by "honest journeywork in default of better," I made the late Sir Leslie Stephen very angry, and shut one of the doors which had been opened to me, by describing Edgar Poe, in an essay which I sent him at his request, as "of the first order of poets." I have not changed my mind in the least on this point between 1876 and 1910, and I am not sure that I should not also now call him very nearly of the first order of prosodists. Neither then nor now, of course, should I have said that everything he did, in practice or theory, was of this first order, in fact positive ignorance, and the lack of a sufficient education, made him lay *The Rationale of Verse* open to a good many damaging criticisms, against which one can only oppose the unhesitating assertion that, in spite of them all, he has the root of the matter in him. As for his verses, he is one of the *pierres de touche*. They are unequal, of course—extremely unequal, but, if you think them valueless at their best you can only be asked to give your exact opinion as to "What is a Pound?" in poetry. And it is to be feared that the value of this opinion would not be itself considerable.

Prosodically at least, there should be no doubt about him, except in the realms of unabashed earlessness. What perhaps may seem to some the chief instance of his prowess in this respect, the "Bells," never appealed to me much. It is all right, of course, in its own way, but that is merely the way of a not very difficult or distinguished *tour de force*, a mechanical thing. But there is no mistake about the "Raven"<sup>1</sup> from our point of view, though it is not a faultless poem from others. The contrast of the rolling, racing trochaics with the fitful internal rhyme (now present, now absent, now extended to the next line), and the "pulled-up" quasi-refrain—that is not mechanical, or if it is, you may please supply machines that will do it, in any number that you like.

<sup>1</sup> The value of his own analysis, as forethought or afterthought, must be left to individual judgment.

In some ways "Ulalume," the most open of all to His verse parody, and—which some things open to parody are not—often perilously near to the ridiculous in its own actual expression, is finer still in prosodic suggestion

Astarte's be-diamonded crescent  
Distinct with its duplicate horn

is a text for a sermon which would "take another glass" and many glasses, to preach satisfactorily. As for "Annabel Lee," the miraculous power of the anapaest, which we have traced and studied so far and so long, seems to have gathered itself into something superhuman here. I pointed out the extraordinary swiftness of Barham's "Smugglers' Leap", but here there is no comedy (which needs and helps speed) at all, and yet the swiftness rises, and doubles right through the poem, till, in the last stanza, you cannot keep up with it. It leaves you panting far behind, as it sinks into the final stillness of the tomb by the side of the sea. But can he only play the dancing dervish—spin and pirouette and gallop? There is sufficient answer in "The Haunted Palace," where the

Banners, yellow, glorious, golden,  
On its roof did float and flow,

and where the trochees themselves float and flow and settle with the soft slowness of snow-flakes. And the softness and the swiftness combine in "For Annie," and the dangerous redundancy of blank verse is almost, if not quite, conquered in one "To Helen," and the quieter lyric is perfect in the other, and there is a whole prosodic *sy/va* in "Al Aaraaf." It is only a handful of verse, this, with the inferior things it does not fill a hundred pages. But how many long poems have the value of these "sonnets," as our ancestors would have called them? Whoso thinks little of Poe, let him suspect that he knows about as little of poetry, and therefore, for fear of accidents, had better say nothing about it.

But we must turn to that curious document—one of His Rationale of Verse the most interesting in this chapter and almost in this

book—the *Rationale of Verse*<sup>1</sup> I have hinted that, for those who merely try to pick holes, it cannot be made “looped and windowed” enough. The author was very imperfectly educated generally, and, I should imagine, knew extremely little of that literature of his subject<sup>2</sup> which is at any rate invaluable as showing one what to avoid. He was writing in partly conscious, partly unconscious discipleship to one of the worst schools of English criticism, that of the thirties and forties, which too frequently combined the swaggering dogmatism of one division of its predecessors with the somewhat anarchic impressionism of the other. He was personally inclined to exaggeration and hasty assertion. Finally, in 1848, when he wrote, everybody was talking about accent, and most people were talking about the hexameter—than which I cannot imagine a worse starting-point for discussing general English prosody.

The consequence is that, as I have said, hole-picking is quite “at discretion.” I think, indeed, that Mr Omond, fairest of critics, has, by mistake, been unfair on one point, in saying that Poe “omits all notice of silent spaces.” The reason of the mistake is to be found in Poe’s extraordinary terminology, and his careless use even of that. When he says that the line

March! March! March!

is “formed of three cæsuras. The cæsura is rejected by English prosodists and grossly misrepresented in the classics,” he talks, of course, ostensible nonsense. But he shows, here and elsewhere, that by that unhappy word “cæsura” he meant “foot partly made up of pause-syllable.”

To criticise separate statements in such a composition and collocation of circumstances would be easy, but idle. I could deny flatly a hundred of them. I really think it is

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, ed Ingram (Edinburgh, 1875), II, 219-266.

<sup>2</sup> It is no contradiction to this that he makes a great display of erudition—even speaking of German treatises on Greek prosody. It is indeed obvious that he knew nothing of classical scansion, since he makes a hopeless hash of such easy things as the choriambic rhythm of *Maenas alans*.

not a mere hyperbole to say that there are hardly more than one or two detailed assertions that will pass muster, and that Poe rarely makes even one of these without giving a wrong reason for it, or advances a solid argument without making some slip in its application

And yet the root or roots of the matter is or are in him. He knows that variation, both in foot and line-length, is the secret of poetic melody. He understands (though the lovely and witty Miss Notable's ancient joke of "understumble" is justified by the fact that he stumbles over it) equivalence. He knows that it is often impossible to determine the metre of a single line. His attempts to fix the exact mathematical value of "length" are futile, but his recognition of the variation of it is invaluable, and when he says, "The object of what we call scansion is the distinct marking of the rhythmical flow," he makes perhaps the exception to his general rule, promulgates the truth once and for all, and, with or without knowing it, sweeps musicians and monopressurists, apostrophators and accent-worshippers, thought-wavers and speech-wavers, all the Doubters and all the Bloodmen that beset the prosodic Mansoul, at once into the abyss.<sup>1</sup>

But the quality which I recognise in Poe, and which esteems him so highly with me, is higher even than this—that he begins with the poetry and adapts his theories to that. In the case of a man who does this, Poetry herself will watch over him to see that he does not dash his foot against a stone. But when a man endeavours, as nearly all prosodists do, to force his theories on Poetry, she will not watch over him, and the stones shall be many and bruising, to head as well as to foot.

The prosody of Longfellow,<sup>2</sup> even outside of the Longfellow, hexameters which have been discussed, is a matter of particular interest, because of the poet's circumstances. As a man slightly older even than Tennyson, and belonging

<sup>1</sup> The whole paragraph, p. 255 *et seq.*, should be read carefully.

<sup>2</sup> We have, of course, nothing to do with the contempt expressed by Philistines of culture—a clan on whom Samson must have plied the ass's jawbone with the keenest sense of enjoyment and congruity—for Longfellow as a poet.



to a country which was only starting an independent literary development, he might be expected to represent, and to some extent did represent, the latest "intermediate" school—that which had grown up to the inheritance of the older Romantics as far as Byron, but which had hardly assimilated Keats and Shelley, and had not felt the new wave of poetic inspiration that made 1830 a year less noisily, but not less really, notable in English than in French literature. On the other hand, he was early despatched to qualify for his professorship by residence on the Continent of Europe; and study of Continental literatures enabled him, in some ways, to anticipate influences which did not work on his English contemporaries till later. And he was himself a remarkable instance of plasticity, in both the passive and the active sense, as far as metrical form was concerned. He was not indeed inclined to accept the severe command—

Sculpte l'ime à cisèle !

in his prosodic creations. He cast rather than wrought, and chose elastic moulds for the casting, but they were very far from being the moulds of the Italian-image-man. A "facile" poet who somehow knocks out such things as "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*" and "The Skeleton in Armour" on one side, as (with all its drawbacks) the *Evangeline* hexameter on another, and as the *Hiawatha* metre on the third, is one whose facility might, with great advantage, be chopped up into as many eyes and cuttings, and propagated as freely, as possible.

Moreover, if Longfellow's music is easy (and it is well to remember that apparent ease is rather a misleading thing) it is always easy music,<sup>1</sup> and those who prefer difficult discord (which is perhaps not so difficult to produce after all) may be left to their preference. His design is almost always happy, his execution almost always satisfactory. The alteration, for instance, of the old Romance-six in the Prelude to *Voices of the Night*, with the shift of the third line to the second place, and the

<sup>1</sup> From this point I leave *Evangeline* and her companions alone

monorhyming of the dimeters, is very agreeable<sup>1</sup> "The Light of Stars" infuses into common measure, if not seventeenth-century witchery, something very different from eighteenth-century namby-pambliness. The anapaestic ballad form of the same measure has seldom been better handled than in "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*," nor the trochaic fifteener than in "The Belfry of Bruges." There is real genius in the acceptance of the simplest form of words to get the utmost prosodic effect in

I am Roland, I am Roland    There is victory in the land

I have spoken on a former occasion (ii 336) of the special attraction, from one point of view, of "The Skeleton in Armour"

The plain but irregularly rhymed octosyllabic couplet comes out famously in "The Occultation of Orion," while the substituted form, with adaptation to semi-dramatic and narrative use, in *The Golden Legend* is really a triumph. For easy conversational blank verse, if not for the greatest dramatic kind, you will not easily beat *The Spanish Student*, while in some of his well-known translations, "The Hemlock Tree," "I know a maiden fair to see," and others, he has shown ability to hammer verse to tune in a way worthy of a pupil of Mimir or Weland. In fact Longfellow represents, for America, the first, and perhaps up to this day the greatest, of the verse-makers who, as we have seen, carried on during the whole of the nineteenth century the principles of prosodic variety and adaptation—of multiplication and development of metrical forms as far as possible, on certain general laws, but with as little minor bye-law as possible.

After Poe, the poet of genius, who accepts, not unconsciously, the general laws of metre and produces

<sup>1</sup> Pleasant it was, when woods were green  
And winds were soft and low,  
To lie amid some sylvan scene  
Where the long drooping boughs between  
Shadows dark and sunlight shewn  
Alternate come and go

The *matrix* may, of course, be taken as the common measure with addition, and the masters as Coleridge and Scott—but that does no harm

masterpieces in them, and Longfellow, the poet of exceptional and wide-ranging talent, who applies his gifts to the formal, as to other parts of his art, with success unvarying, or varying only according to the possibilities of his experiment—there is an unusual aptness, an almost artificial completion of the set, in Walt Whitman, another poet of genius who devotes himself to formal, as to other, revolt

Whitman

The genesis of Whitman's dithyrambic versicles is sufficiently clear, even if we set aside the direct Emersonian suggestions which were hinted at above. I do not know his letters, and the biographical writings about him, so well as I know his poems, and so I cannot say whether he ever gave his own account of it. But, presumptuous as it may seem to say so, a poet's account of such things is by no means always the true account of them. That true account, in Whitman's case, does not need a combination of the late Professor Owen and the living Professor Sievers to make out. The impulsive cause of it was, no doubt, that natural and not disgraceful, though sometimes slightly comic, desire to be entirely original and American—to give an unadulterated product of These States,—of which Longfellow, with the best right in the world, has made such excellent fun in *Kavanaugh*. The cause of pattern or suggestion was even more undoubtedly—still leaving the Emersonian following as unproved—the verse-divisions of the English Bible. How far possible secondary causes of development by hints from Blake, De Quincey, Lamennais,<sup>1</sup> and others may have helped, is a more speculative division of the subject. But the last and completely formative cause was, as it always is, the idiosyncrasy of the writer. Whitman could and did write more or less regular metre, and his actual medium is often a plum-pudding-stone or conglomerate of metrical fragments. Still the form which he mainly adopts, though hybrid between poetry and prose, is a genuine thing as far

<sup>1</sup> On the whole, and allowing for the differences of person, subject, and language, the *Paroles d'un croyant* is sometimes surprisingly near *Leaves of Grass*.

as it goes—a true hybrid, and not a mere Watertonian cobbling together of unrelated elements

The result, at its best, is not easy to specify or exemplify precisely, because it has no ruling type. Of one kind I really do not know a better example than a passage the praise of which, many years ago, excited the never-to-be-quenched wrath of one of the most "cultured" of American prints. It comes early in *Leaves of Grass*,<sup>1</sup> and is one of a series of similitudes for the grass itself

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,  
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,  
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may  
see and remark and say, *Whose?*

Here, it will be observed, there is, though no metre, a comparatively regular progression of a quasi-metrical kind, capable of several divisions no doubt, but grouping easiest into something like three, four, and six or seven examples of the "prose-feet"—pæons, epitrites, or dochmiacs—which we have occasionally mentioned. The length of these versicles (which are batched in subsections of absolutely optional length) is quite irregular, they might be monosyllabic—though I do not at the moment remember, or in a casual turning over find, one, and they may extend to several lines, though they seldom do, except in the catalogue-pieces, to more than three or four. Even on these last Whitman can often inculcate an excellent rhythmical undulation and final break. But they naturally tend, at times, to something like this

Not a move can a man or woman make that affects him or her in  
a day, month, any part of the direct life-time, or the hour of  
death, but the same affects him or her onward afterward  
through the indirect life-time

That is not without rhythm—hardly any but the most abject prose is,—but it is prose pure and simple. In fact no small part of the "Verse"—he calls it "verse" him-

<sup>1</sup> "Walt Whitman," section 6, subsection 28 (p. 34 of the two-volume Autograph Edition, Camden, N. J., 1876)

self—if printed straight on, would be indistinguishable from no small part of the prose (*Democratic Vistas*, etc) which *is* so printed.

On the other hand, not a few of the shorter or middle-cut verses have an inefficient suggestion of ordinary verse, as where the tails of the lines, and to some extent their bodies, give confused echoes of *Evangeline* hexameters, or Ionics *a minore* clumsily and inharmoniously managed. The fact is that people have not, as a rule, treated Whitmanics sensibly. I have never myself been able to see why they should be barred, as a variety of expression, when the poet (or whatever he likes to call himself) chooses them, and can justify the choice. It is evident that the continuity of ordinary prose may be inconvenient for some subjects, and uncongenial for some moods. It is, I think, at least fair matter of contention that the regularity of verse, even with all the easements and licences possible to it, if it is to remain verse, may be subject to similar drawbacks. But I should doubt whether the medium will ever be susceptible of any but very occasional use,<sup>1</sup> and I am certain that the justification mentioned above will only be secured by keeping it nearer to verse than to prose, and by rigidly excluding *purely* prosaic passages. Moreover, in a very large number of instances, verse would do even better what this does well. And from Whitman's actual experiments it is clear that had he chosen, and taken the trouble, he could have written beautiful verse proper. Yet it is clear also, that in passages, and many of them, the marriage of matter and form justifies itself as a true marriage. So let it be registered as such, with the banns and the warnings properly proclaimed and attended to.

<sup>1</sup> Whitmanics were for a time, as was natural, essayed on this side the water, but not with much success. The best I know are O'Shaughnessy's "Earth" in *Music and Moonlight*, and parts of a most admirable description of Oxford undergraduate life, entitled "Poem of Joys," which appeared in the *Poems* of "Thomas White, jun." (Oxford and London, 1876). But I have been credibly informed that there was "no *such* a person," and that the real Thomas, since he became senior, writes about prosody. I wish I had any chance of reversing the process, and, in my second juniority or childhood, of writing anything so good as this "Poem of Joys."

We must now turn to the purer theorists who have, as Rush I have said, been remarkably numerous in America for the last three-quarters of a century at least, and whose work, especially in isolated articles or papers, I do not pretend to do more than select for summary. Bryant's early defence of substitution has been mentioned. One of the earliest *book*-writers on the subject (or rather on something connected with it) with whom I am acquainted, James Rush of Philadelphia, is so frankly physiological in his *Philosophy of the Human Voice* (1827), that if I had anything to say against him here, I should not say it. He worked his work—I doubt not, well—with the "Unequal Single Wave" and the "Drift of the Downward Vanish", but I have nothing to do with them, though I should like to write a poem with the second title. Still some of his *obiter dicta* are almost as suggestive as those of Roe<sup>1</sup>. There is not a little food for reflection in his observation that "persons who sing with the greatest execution are rarely or never good *readers*". And perhaps there is still more in this—that "many passages by good poets *cannot be read with satisfaction to a discerning ear*". Perhaps this accounts for what he would call the "Downward Radical and Vanishing Movement," so noticeable to us in most handlings of prosody from the musical-elocutory point of view. But he really does not even venture to handle prosody directly.

Poe and Holmes I have dealt with, and, outside them, Lanier, the chief prosodic attention of the middle century was given in America, as with us, to the evangel of *Evangeline*. But in 1881, just before its author's death, I think, was published a volume on *The Science of English Verse*, which has had a greater reputation, perhaps, than any other American book on the subject. In coming, therefore, to Sidney Lanier I come once more to a *pas périlleux*. Although Mr Omond sees numerous faults of detail in this enthusiastic, amiable, and apparently much regretted Southern poet and critic, he hails him as, on the whole

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* p 159. Rush followed Roe closely in date, and believed in Steele, Roe's master.

sound in principle, and American prosodists generally seem to regard him as a prosodic Moses who *was* allowed actually to lead others to the Promised Land. For my part, I can only close my visor, put lance in rest, and loosen sword in scabbard. On no terms can I accept Mr Lanier here. To begin with, he does not merely, like Steele (to whom he is ungrateful), use musical analogies and parallel explanations, but he interprets prosody wholly and exclusively in terms of music, and uses no other symbols than musical notes. Now this I am bound to pronounce something like impertinence, in the worse as well as in the less bad sense of the word. If I ask a man to translate some Greek for me into English, and he translates it into Spanish, I have a right to retort something less than courteously. His Spanish translation may or may not be correct<sup>1</sup>. I may know Spanish enough to make it intelligible to me, or I may not. The impertinence remains. Secondly, I cannot understand how such a student as Mr Omond can credit Lanier with having, in the year 187-something, "finally established temporal relations as essential to verse," "brought fundamentals to light," and so on. I cannot see that he did anything of the kind, and I am quite sure that, if he did, he was doing nothing new. Every one who ever used the words "long" and "short," and who did not go a-wandering after accentualism, had always known the temporal character of our rhythms. But, as always, I bring Mr Lanier to the trial of the pyx, *in particulars*. It may be that English iambic verse is in "3-time" from some crotchet-and-quaver point of view—it is not from any other,<sup>2</sup> and if it were, the whole beauty of *actual* "3-time" substitution would disappear. However keen his musical ear may have been, his prosodic one must have been pretty dull, for his individual scansion is often atrocious, and he sees identity where there is at

<sup>1</sup> It is not, I hope, merely malicious to point out that hardly any two musical prosodists agree as to the actual *representativeness* of their notation. *V. sup.* p. 477.

<sup>2</sup> Not even from the strictest valuation of quantity, for even if — be taken as = two ♪s, they are not lumped together as = 3

once the widest and the subtlest diversity • But one citation shall serve for a thousand *Paradise Lost* "is written in the *same* typic form of 3-rhythm as Shakespeare's plays" Oh, very like a whale indeed, Mr Lanier—quite remarkably like a whale !

Of course I know I shall be told that it is my Philistine indifference to "pitch" and "tone-colour," and things of that sort, which makes me insensible of Lanier's merit; "Hippocleides does not care" much In fact, when Hippocleides finds, not Lanier, but a pupil of his, declaring that such a sound as "oo" in "gloom" is "peculiarly adapted to express horror, solemnity, awe, deep grief, slowness of motion, darkness, and extreme or oppressive greatness of size," he feels inclined to send for his table, and indulge in a few gesticulations Change *g* for *o*, and "bloom," in flesh and flower, expresses "horror, etc, etc," admirably, does it not? I have seen an unpublished variation on *Hudibras*, which contains these reprehensible lines

For all a *phonetician's* rules  
Are good for, is amusing — I

But let us not be irreverent Without irreverence one may say that Lanier is but another instance of the apparently immutable law, that music and prosody *must* be kept apart, great as they both are, and near as they come to each other

Let it, however, be granted that a writer with such a sponsor as Mr Omond, and with so fair a herd of disciples, deserves more serious treatment than this He shall have it At the very opening (p xiv) of his preface Lanier remarks that the doctrine that accent makes a syllable long is "unaccountable to the musician" Perhaps, but this of itself is evidence that "the musician" is not at the point of view, for this doctrine is certainly not "unaccountable" even to those prosodists, such as Mr Omond himself, who think it wrong The fact, as pointed out elsewhere, that accent has no place in music, at once shows that music and prosody cannot be on all fours



I have said hard things of the accentualists here—I could say harder, but to rule accent altogether out of English prosody would be, to me, absurd. You must keep it in its place, and take care that that place is a minor or subsidiary one—that of a caterer, valet, or some such official, but a place it must have.

Again, Lanier's doctrine that "verse deals purely with sounds" is *dolosa*. It does, but *with what kind of sounds?* He lays down in parallel statements (typographically ordered so as to indicate their importance), as his base-doctrines, the propositions that "the exact co-ordinations which the ear perceives as rhythm, time, and tone-colour, suggested to it by musical sounds, are music," and that the ditto ditto suggested by spoken words are verse. This, or rather the inferences from it, I deny. In the first place, an unknown language produces a quite different effect from music. In the second, the *variation*, and, above all, the *composition*, of spoken (or rather read) sounds is very different from, and infinitely more complex than, that of music. You cannot get out of this by juggling about "tone-colour," and by arguing that different instruments vary the same note, and different performers the same notes on the same instrument. There is no analogy here to the subtlety of verse. There might be to the difference of Jones's, and Smith's, and Brown's *recitation* of verse, even to the individual poet Jones's, Smith's, or Brown's *handling* of verse, but that is quite a separate thing.<sup>1</sup>

From this initial confusion we should be prepared for another, and it duly follows. Even Mr Omond is staggered by the facility with which Lanier discovers his favourite "three-rhythm" alike in Anglo-Saxon verse and the Cuckoo-song, in Langland and in Chaucer. The fact is, of course, that, by the usual processes of slur and shake, you can get almost any rhythm into any other *musically*—you can, as Milton contemptuously puts it, "commit

<sup>1</sup> In fact one does not read poetry, silently, with one's own voice or any other, but with an abstract or generalised "mind's voice," almost or quite destitute of tonality, yet one perceives the rhythm perfectly.

short and long" as you please You cannot do that on any sound system of prosody

In fact Lanier shows eminently what all his kind show more or less They and the accentualists distribute—to speak with no irreverence—a breach of one of the laws of the Athanasian Creed between them By neglecting all but stressed syllables, and casting loose the others, the accentualists "divide the substance" of feet By their promiscuous valuations of possibly equivalent, but actually different, foot-forms, the musicalists "confound the persons" Only by recognising the independent personality of different feet can the true nature of English verse be understood; and, when you once leave that citadel of strength, you enter upon a labyrinth, the outlets of which are beset by Guest on one side and Lanier on the other, in the same fashion and position in which Gibbon long ago established Cerinthus and Apollinaris, but *not* in the double "twilight of sense and heresy"

On the other hand, the republication of Guest pro- Dr Price. duced in America, as it did in England, the idea that a new revelation in English prosody had been waiting for acceptance I have for many years possessed—in fact it was, I believe, one of the first things that made me ask myself whether a thorough handling of the facts of that prosody was not desirable—a paper<sup>1</sup> by Dr. Thomas R. Price, which was read before the New York Shakespeare Society on May 20, 1886 In this the author informs us that "the old scansion by feet failed to explain the movement of the old ballad, it failed to explain the stately march of Milton's blank verse, most of all and worst of all, it failed to interpret the freedom and grace of Shakespeare's matchless cadences" I think I may say that, by the frank acknowledgment even of some who do not wholly agree with me, I have shown in this book that it failed to do nothing of the kind in any of the three cases, but I am very little concerned to tripudiate over Dr Price on this score I wish to deal only with

<sup>1</sup> *Papers of the NYSSS*, No 8, "The Construction and Types of Shakespeare's Verse as seen in the [sic] *Othello*" (New York, 1888)

his substitute for "the old scansion by feet"—the new "scansion by staves" He applies this particularly to *Othello*, but with a few references to other and later English poetry

Now it will surely surprise any person who has not read Dr Price to be told, and any one who reads him to find, that after all "the old scansion by feet" reappears at the door, apparently not a penny the worse from having been staved out of the window He finds staves from *Beowulf* to Tennyson, but these staves are trochaic, dactylic, logæædic, and anapæstic They have anacrusis, they are catalectic or "full", they exist in dipodies, tripodies, tetrapodies, etc The only difference is that they are lumped—taken in batches instead of individually "New presbyter" is indeed here "old priest writ large" with a vengeance I have been rebuked for prosodic jargon, but have I ever called half a line anything worse than a tripody catalectic, syncopated in the first foot?

But "let us to the magazine," as the pirate in yellow boots observed—that is to say, to the actual scansions Dr Price is an unhesitating trochee-base man All iambic lines are "trochees with anacrusis" So he makes *Othello's* broken line, I III 261—

Let her have your voices,

a trochaic tripody

I feel constrained to complete this in a manner which would form an excellent catch for the comic stage

Let her have your voices—(*cheers*)—  
This my heart rejoices !  
Every girl and boy sees  
What a dear she is !

The compound line, III III 215—

Not a jot | not a jot |  
I' faith | I fear | it has,

one of the simplest things in Shakespeare, is indeed "anapæstic," but it is in some mysterious fashion "catalectic" (there is not a syllable wanting anywhere), and

has an "anacrusis" of two syllables. Another, equally simple and regular, not even compound, V 1 47—

Here's one | comes in | his shirt | with light | and weapons,  
is an "abnormal" line "syncopated in the first foot"  
Really "Bil Stumps his mark" becomes hardly a parody,  
after such hopelessly absurd muddlings of the clearest  
water

• Let us, however, take one other example from Dr. Price. It is, of all marvellous things, from "The Two Voices". Now there are, of course, trochaic beginnings in "The Two Voices". They are accounted for, on the system of this book, with no difficulty and with no violence. But Dr Price would scan—

Again the voice said unto me,  
Thou art so full of misery,  
Surely 'twere better not to be,

because of "Surely" in the third line—

A  
gain the  
voice said  
unto  
me,  
Thou  
art so  
full of  
miser  
y,  
Surely—

where, it may be observed, the obvious trochaic beginning, if relied on, *disturbs* any subsequent trochaic rhythm, while if it is not, the suggestion vanishes—not to mention that in any case the "ridiculousness" of the division, which even Ruskin noticed, remains. One really need go no further

Professor Gummere is, I suppose, the chief living <sup>Professor</sup> authority in America on English Poetics, and his book <sup>Gummere</sup> with that title<sup>1</sup> has had a long and well-deserved reputa-

<sup>1</sup> 1885 His later *Beginnings of Poetry* (1901) has a special subject, with which we are not much concerned. Another American manual of authority, Professor H. Coison's *Primer of English Verse* (1892), consists of useful notes on various things from the *ax, xa* point of view

tion. It seems to me, however, that Professor Gummere is more really interested in theories as to the origin of poetry—its connection with savages, dancing, etc.—and in questions relating to the not quite similar origin of forms (his treatment of ballads is again famous), than in the contemplation of English verse as a sifted and arranged mass, and in the development, from this sifting and arrangement, of the principles common to it. In his *Poetics* he contrasts quantity and accent, on strict “time” principles in the former case and “stress” principles in the latter. I have said often enough, and perhaps too often, that I think the conduct of inquiries on this basis a case of *propter vitam vivendi perdere causas*—or the other way, which is practically the same. He inclines chiefly to accent, allows (which is no doubt much) the pause-foot or half-foot, but, like almost all his clan, avoids and evidently distrusts *feet* themselves. He brings to a point an *aporia* which has pervaded prosodic inquiry largely of late by saying, “Every one knows, or ought to know, that the classical iambus or anapæst is very different from the iambus or anapæst of modern poetry.” Now I have been so bold as to say “*Is it?*” My boldness is tempered by trepidation, for I am quite aware that powerful folk of all sorts do concede this. But, after all, I have been tolerably familiar with both classical and modern poetry for a good many years, and I sometimes wonder whether the people who are most familiar with the one—either one—usually know most of the other—either other. That classical *combinations* of feet—nay, that classical feet isolated, if you can isolate such a gregarious thing as a foot—are different from English, that in modern French it is questionable whether there is a foot at all, except as a kind of metrical fiction, that German relies chiefly on stress, and Italian and, still more, Spanish on a kind of bar-szygy, I am disposed to allow, in fact to assert. But the extraordinary *compositeness* of English seems to me to have brought with it a sort of sixteen-quarter heraldry of characterisation. An English iamb in English may have differences from a Greek one in

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Greek ; an English dactyl (when you find him) may have more *But the relations of the feet to the general structure of the language* do not strike me as "very different"—hardly as different at all. Euripides, with allowance for Greek, and Milton, with allowance for English, seem to me pretty close prosodically. Homer and Clough are very far apart, not because they use different feet, but because the feet march together in one language and kick against each other in the other.

For the rest, the old crux of individual tests tells against Professor Gummere, with me. When a man can find only four accents in

Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore,

I "look at him very sorrowfully," as an excellent story has it, and a heroic line with only *two* real stresses (I do not think an example is given) appears to me a sort of heroic cherub—possibly beautiful, but distinctly incomplete.

If enthusiasm and frank acknowledgment of indebtedness to authorities were sufficient to justify a book, Miss Julia P. Dabney's<sup>1</sup> would be more than justified. Miss Julia  
Dabney It may be added that she seems to have taken not a little trouble to acquaint herself with modern writers on her subject, and that though her knowledge of verse seems to be rather more supplied by them than by the actual poets, it is not so very small. Here, however, one fears, praise must stop. Miss Dabney is hopelessly musical, and her knowledge of the history of her subject seems to begin surprisingly late. She thinks that Coleridge "made a great discovery" in basing verse on accent, and she thinks that Mr Sidney Lanier's was, not only a brilliant, but the first deliberate, attempt—the attempt of a "pioneer"—to use musical notation. Now it is hardly necessary to say that, however important Coleridge's practice may have been, his "discovery" of principle (putting his expression of it quite aside) was the discovery of a *secret de Polichinelle*, and that Mr Lanier "pioneered" a path as beaten as the Appian Way, and built a bridge as new as the Pont Neuf.

<sup>1</sup> *The Musical Basis of English Verse*, London and New York, 1901.

Miss Dabney's original propositions, when they cease to be ingenuously romantic ("In the beginning, out of the mists of Time, hand in hand came those two sisters of Art, Music and Verse," etc), are too often something more than questionable Verse is "purely a matter of vibration", so one supposes that a "Veedee vibrator" might with advantage replace the antiquated lyre and shell, if not the poet himself. Octosyllabics ("2/4 verse," as she calls them, which suggests gloves) have "the least internal music" of any metre (hear it! *Comus* and *Il Penseroso*, hear it! ye "Lines to A L" and *The Ring given to Venus*) Common measure is "the feeblest of all vehicles for poetic expression" And this feeble vehicle carried poets of the seventeenth century to the heart of the rose of the seventh Heaven of Poetry! One is afraid that Miss Dabney's book, like the Rake's play, "will not *doe*"

Professor  
Liddell

I am afraid I can say nothing complimentary of Professor Mark H Liddell's *Introduction to the Scientific Study of English Poetry* (1902) It is written with that complacent confidence (Lord Melbourne would have used a more familiar phrase) which is frequently connoted by the use of the words "science" and "scientific", and, as that use also prepares one to find, it is in the main a *λειτουργία* to the great goddess Terminology, whom the unkind sometimes call Jargon Mr Liddell is as contemptuous of accents as of feet—of feet as of accents. "Thought-moments," "attention-stresses," "normal concomitants of ideation"—these are what he offers us He is, I believe, a good scholar in Middle English, but he shows little knowledge of English poetry as a whole, and (which is no doubt of less importance) less of the history of prosodic inquiry In fact, though he is not an accentualist, he is a stress-man, which means that almost entire anarchy is substituted for an at least apparent constitution Lastly, Mr Liddell is given to *obiter dicta*, which are dangerously subject to "retorsion" "Chaucer and Horace had never heard such a speech as we put into their mouths" I am for once inclined to be a stress-man, and to italicise that "we" For I am pretty

certain that Mr Liddell does not know, any more than I do myself, how Chaucer pronounced, and I do not believe that any one has any but a very faint idea of the pronunciation of Horace. This, no doubt, is outside the main matter, but on that main matter I should say that Mr Liddell is always outside. His system is a rhetorical-philosophical fifth wheel to a coach of prosody which unfortunately lacks the other four. I do not think it will travel far.

I can speak with much more approval, though not with <sup>Professor</sup> very much more agreement, of Professor Chaifon M <sup>Lewis</sup> Lewis's *Foreign Sources of English Versification* (1898) and *Principles of English Verse* (1906). Here there is much learning and a scholarly manner, while a great many of the separate observations are true and sound. Unfortunately the old evil of insufficient ear, and the almost equally old one of wandering away from the sound foot-system after will-o'-the-wisps of "stress" and "rhythm" (Professor Lewis does keep himself from such more fantastic idols as "tone-colour"), prevent complete satisfaction. He thinks, for instance, not merely that the iambic lines of *Christabel* are associable with the anapæstic ones, but that they are individually homogeneous, and that the differences of name (anapæstic, trochaic, iambic, etc.) are "due to the inadequacy of the system." It is just the other way. *His* system is self-condemned of inadequacy when, for instance, it judges a passage (already quoted by Mr Omond)—

The house dog moans and the beams crack,  
to be *the same*, in pronounced rhythm, as

The house dog moans and the beams are cracked

The two are *equivalent*, and *adjustable* to each other in a common scheme, but they are as far as possible from being identical, and, as Coleridge himself showed, even the adjustment requires care, lest confusion of rhythmical basis result. Each could, in fact, be fitted with companions which would make perfectly different rhythm-totals. Professor Lewis, however, does not wholly reject feet or



their traditional names, though he has some curious ideas about their qualities, and he is duly, if not quite *distinguishtly*, regardful of time. He seems to me, if I may say so without offence, to have begun theorising and "researching" a little too early, and before he had impressed the poetic facts sufficiently on ear and brain.

There remains a considerable number of American books and articles, some of which are actually by my side or upon my shelves as I write, and more of which I have read and annotated, but which space, and other considerations already referred to, make it impossible for me to notice in detail. The great increase of "post-graduate" study, and of subsidiary courses, in the American Universities, and the extensive adoption of the system of thesis-monographs, have naturally contributed to this production, and will contribute. A few books and writers should probably be at least mentioned. The bibliography and summaries in Professors Gayley and Scott's *Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* (Boston, 1899)—a book the value of which has been again and again acknowledged by those who have used it during the last ten years—cannot be too highly praised, and each of its authors has done independent work on the subject—of which I may specially refer to Professor Scott's paper on "The Most Fundamental Differentia between Poetry and Prose." Professor W H Browne (to whom I am indebted for courteous review of my own work, and even more courteous private communications) wrote, as long ago as 1890, a paper on the "Structure of English Verse," which he has, I believe, followed up with others. He is a stave-man with strong views of his own on other points, but I think we could establish a Concordat. Professor J W Bright, who contributed in 1901 a paper on "Grammatical Ictus in English Verse" to the *Furnivall Birthday Miscellany*, has, it seems, made quite a school, but I do not find clear guidance in his work as to *how* I am to "approximate the exaltation of the poet," though I most heartily agree in the desirableness of doing so as far as it can be done. Professor Corson's *Primer of English Verse*

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has been already noticed, as may be now a long series of works on *Æsthetics* by Professor G L Raymond. Lastly, two very useful books, *English Verse* (1903), and *An Introduction to Poetry* (1909), by Professor R M. Alden, contain—the first, a large collection of examples and a good deal of precept, the second, an expansion of the precept, with considerable summary and discussion of preceding prosodists. I wish I could agree with Professor Alden, that “recent writers have seemed to tend more and more towards agreement on certain *substantial* principles.” But he has himself collected opinions with care, and has not seldom criticised them with acuteness. I refer elsewhere<sup>1</sup> to what I think a shortcoming of his in reference to a phrase of my own, but to multiply such things is impossible.

<sup>1</sup> *V inf* App II.

## CONCLUSION

THERE is perhaps not less real arrogance than there is apparent humility in the famous description of the relations of the man who begins a book and the man who finishes it, as being those of scholar and tutor. For my part I should be satisfied, and more than satisfied, if the reader of these three volumes has been made by them scholar enough to tutor me in some respects. I have undertaken no task, and I desire for myself no credit, but that of setting out, in fairly orderly fashion, the procession—the pageant, if the word be not hacked to death—the pilgrimage of the life of English poetry, in its formal manifestations, from the time when, *as* English poetry, it began to exist. I have indeed tried to make this not a mere chronicle or a mere tabular conspectus, but a real history, written from that uniting point of view which every real history must have. But I have endeavoured also—and I hope I have succeeded in doing it—to prevent my point of view from getting in the way of my readers' vision. Mitford and Guest, practically the only English writers who have ever tried, even partially, to do the same thing, did, I think, especially in the last case, commit this error, and even if they had not, I have over them the illegitimate advantage of seeing two, if not three, stages further than Mitford, one, if not two, stages further than Guest, could possibly see. The greater advantage brings, of course, the greater responsibility.

In this final chapter—which must do the triple duty of Interchapter to the previous Book, of interim summary to this volume, and of Conclusion proper—I do not propose to expatiate much. I have, I think, honestly

informed the reader of the point of view above referred to, I have endeavoured, without lugging in discussion of it by head and shoulders, to justify its adoption where it seemed proper to do so, and the Appendix will enable me to take up some special or general points. Here we may sail fairly "easy" as a preliminary to dropping the anchor.

To those to whom my system seems inadequate let it be inadequate, and to those to whom it seems mere scholastic jargon let it remain so. If Gallo were in the chair now I have not the slightest doubt that he would call the scansion of English heroics by iamb or trochee, and the scansion of English hexameters by dactyl or anapæst, "questions of words and names." I dare say Ippolito d'Este would dismiss the whole collection of things as something which the unexpected prudery of Italian literary historians wrangles about, in regard to its exact designation. I rather fear that Jeffrey (though he was no such bad critic, on the whole, as people think sometimes) would decide that it would never do. Yet somehow the more competent judgment of posterity has not quite validated the decisions of the proconsul and the cardinal and the editor. The question, once more, comes to this, "Whether some system of analysing the characteristics of verse, and, in a vaguer way, of versification, does not add to the appreciation of poetry, and so to the pleasure and advantage of mankind?" Yet further to this, "Whether this particular system does not, with most extension and least contentiousness, contribute to that analysis?"

I am content to leave the decision to my readers<sup>1</sup>

These readers will have found in this final Book, besides a certain amount of matter which seemed necessary for completeness from various points of view, the history of the last completed stage of nineteenth-century

<sup>1</sup> By an odd chance, I had written these words some weeks before a reviewer in the *Guardian*, to whom I formerly referred, and who disagrees with me on several important points, acknowledged that "it is quite possible that this is the only method which is capable of being worked up into a complete system."

prosody, and not a little of twentieth The features of that stage, if not so novel as they have seemed to some, are what is far more interesting than mere novelty—"true," as the florists say—accurate developments of former stages. The body of verse, of which Mr Swinburne was the latest and the greatest master, displays, it may be in its furthest immediate form, the group of tendencies which, originating from the reaction against eighteenth-century styles, and especially against 'the Popian couplet, was strengthened, varied, and regimented by the individual poetic powers and predilections of the great group of poets from Wordsworth to Keats. These poets did not, to any large extent, devote themselves to prosodic theory, but their prosodic practice, in regard both to metre and to diction, was of enormous importance.

Reaction and production together tended, as has been shown in former Interchapters, in the first place, to a great multiplication of metres, in the second, to a free though by no means anarchic management of the metres selected, and, in the third, to the substitution, for one particular and limited convention of ornament in diction, of an immense enlargement of the poetical dictionary—an enlargement in all directions—plainness, archaism, familiarity, gorgeousness beside which eighteenth-century conventional ornament grew pale, technicality, everything.

Further, the practice of poetry under these influences resulted in phenomena of divers kinds, and not easily arranged in other than cross-division—a great preponderance of lyric, the strenuous and constant endeavour to increase the range of appeal to the reader's faculties of mental sight and hearing, some others perhaps.

These things—manifested in the whole period, and thus proper to the concluding remarks on the volume as well as on this Book—became more and more evident in the time and at the hands of Tennyson and Browning, and most evident of all in the work of the poets most immediately under consideration. Rossetti's influence as a painter, and the strong pictorial element in Morris, could escape no one. Mr Swinburne was more purely

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an artist in words, and though, as I have tried to point out, both his companions were great prosodic practitioners, there could be no question of his pre-eminence in prosodic virtuosity. It was, in fact, so great in degree that it was mistaken in kind, and that it received compliments on its originality which would have been much better addressed to its admirable "improvement" (in the best sense of that term) of the lessons of the ancestors.

The developments of these principles and practices, in their last stage, we have seen in the preceding Book: whether we have seen anything that will definitely either oust or develop them further is a question which I do not attempt to answer. We have seen in the further past—and he was a wise man who said "The Past is the Self what it is and what it shall be"—two forms or varieties of vicissitude in more or less accomplishment. There has been the steady development, on the same but extended lines, which we have seen from St Godric to Mr Swinburne, and there have been various checks, offsets, set-back, and other complications of reaction, or revolt, or mere experiment, such as the alliterative revival, the wanderings in the wilderness of doggerel, the attempts—always unsuccessful, but constantly revived—at classical versing, and, most remarkable and pertinacious of all, the limitation in form and rule imposed on the poetic spirit during, and for some little time before, the eighteenth century. To which of these two divisions our rhymelessness, our discord-seeking, our stress-prosodies and other things belong, Time will show. But one thing I think we may dare say that even he will not show, and that is any positive and final solution of continuity in the general course of English prosody.

The characteristics of the last minor stage have been also those of the major, and the curious *knitting* of nineteenth-century poetry, by the length of life and the continuity in production of its poets, brought this about necessarily. Tennyson himself was born in the first decade of the century, and lived into the last, he actually published verse from the second to the tenth decade.

At the moment (itself the very centenary of his birth) when I write these words, there is still living<sup>1</sup> one of the authors of the *Bon Gaultier Ballads*, published sixty-five years ago. There never has been so long a time—111 years if we start from the *Lyrical Ballads*, 129 if we start from the *Poetical Sketches*—during no single year of which there was not living a poet—during few years of which there were not living several poets, who had published, were publishing, and were to publish, work of the first order in poetry. And there never was one so knit, overlapped, latticed, cross-hatched, intertwined, as regards the style and characteristics of that poetry.

Yet these all developed legitimately from the earlier history, if—in regard to its immediately earlier stage—partly by the way of resilience and reaction. All the story is one, and that—with some things as to the character of the story—is what I chiefly hope to have been able to impress on such readers as may have been, or may be, good enough to follow me through the long unrolling of it. I have been (not too severely) impeached of diffusiveness, but I really do not know what I could have omitted, without omitting at once something not unimportant in itself and something all-important in the history as such. The gradual formation of the blend called the English language, and the concomitant determining of a new blend of prosody—not French, not Latin, not Old English, not a mere mechanical jumble of all three, but a new chemical compound, or a fresh sculpturesque configuration—formed the subject of the earlier part of the first volume, and I must again repeat that if any one really wishes to understand English prosody up to its very latest stage, or in any of its stages, it is this Period of the Origins that he must study. Guest studied it with his mind made up, his spectacles ready coloured, and a determination to look only at what had come before, not at what has come after it. Mitford had no full opportunities, nor any satisfactory apparatus, for studying it, while he also had a theory. There have

<sup>1</sup> Sir Theodore Martin died a few days later

been many modern students of it, with ever-increasing provision of the facilities which Mitford lacked. But they have generally approached it from the philological side only, they have, in the majority of cases, been students rather of parts than of the whole, they have very seldom indeed allowed the lessons of subsequent poetry to have their fair influence, and they have almost to a man adopted, without investigation, the accent- or beat-system which has been foisted in from abroad, and developed by persons lacking English tongues or English ears, and mostly under the domination of an artificial and arbitrary system of phonetics.

What these various influences produced was the Foot (see App I)—that is to say, the integral collocation of "long" and "short," "strong" and "weak," "accented" and "unaccented" syllables. This constitutes the difference of English prosody, on the one side from French, which is syllabic almost wholly to begin with, though influenced and qualified at the end by rhetorical or individual "fingerings", on another from German, which is accentual mainly, though with tendencies towards feet,<sup>1</sup> and on yet another from the strict classical prosodies, where the feet are constituted from more or less invariably and antecedently quantified or quantifiable syllables. It comes nearest to the foot of Latin accentual prosody (whence probably the error about English accent being its foundation), but is differentiated by the absence of that apparent pull *against* quantity which (again the cause of serious error in regard to English) does sometimes appear in mediæval Latin, and is flagrant in such earlier barbaresque verse as that of Commodian.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I must not be misunderstood here. The prosodies of German and English are of course very close, and in blank verse especially German is even more apparently "regular" than English, but German pulls more towards Accent, and English more towards Quantity.

<sup>2</sup> The Commodianic hexameter (*v. sup* 1 18) is sometimes an odd counter-part to our more modern English attempts, such as those of Mr Stone and Mr Bridges. But on this point, and on the remarks above as to foreign prosodists, I would invite attention, from those who know how to "transpose," to some striking observations of Pepys. Samuel knew nothing about verse, but he knew a good deal about music, and he was one of those absolutely natural men whose observations, when they are shrewd as well as natural, go



It was the later business of the First volume to show how this foot-arrangement, slowly emerging in distinct but ~~incomplete conditions~~ during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was, by the sudden application of Chaucer's genius, brought to what perfection it could, in the state of the language, attain, how changes in word-structure and in pronunciation, uncombated by such genius as his, reduced most literary poetry in Southern English to something like prosodic chaos in the fifteenth century, though folk-song went its own saved and saving way, and how, with the New Learning and the settlement of the language, but still under a terror of the doggerel anarchy which had prevailed, things grew slowly better, till Spenser established the form of English verse afresh, brought out the foot-arrangement once more unmistakably, but (as was natural and fitting in the circumstances), kept to the side of order, and latterly did not even adventure in the freer but still orderly lyric

In the Second volume we saw how this re-established command of the foot by degrees, owing partly to real lyric, but still more to the great adventure of blank verse—which showed that the foot had "felt itself" and its power independently of rhyme,—attained once more the full franchise of equivalence, and began to show, in Shakespeare and Milton, the astonishing and almost miraculous powers of the English blend We saw, too, how even yet things were not finally assured, and how, after the extravagances of the enjambed couplet and the "second doggerel" of broken-down blank verse, another period of severe restriction was found necessary, and was

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very far in matters with which they are acquainted "I am convinced more and more that, as every nation has a particular accent and tone in discourse, so as the tone of one not to agree with or please the other, no more can the fashion of singing to words, so that the better the words are set the more they take in the ordinary tone of the country whose language the song speaks. So that a song well composed by an Englishman must be better to an Englishman than it can be to a stranger, or than if set by a stranger in foreign words" (Easter, Ap 7, 1667, just before "The Dutch in the Medway," ed Wheatley, vi pp 260-261) This passage, which Lord Braybrooke omitted, is for infinite thought, and may plead for Samuel against many Dianas, and Betties, and Dolls, and so forth

provided by the tyranny of the other form of couplet, and of few and strictly tied-up lyrical measures, during the eighteenth century

And here, in the Third, we have seen another loosing of the bonds, another exultation of freedom—whether also another tendency to excesses beyond and against prosodic nature, it is not necessary to say. In the chapters of it I have not attempted to sum up the general prosodic character of Mr Swinburne and Mr Morris, of Tennyson and Browning, even perhaps of Shelley and Keats—as it is now possible, and as it was not for Mitford or even Guest, to sum up those of Chaucer and Spenser, of Shakespeare and Milton, of Dryden and Pope. I doubt whether the person is yet born—he is certainly not long out of his cradle—who can do this, or for many years will be able to do it. The perspective of the past is not yet firm enough for that. But I have, I think, given the intermediate and preliminary analysis—in a way which may be useful even to the person who has been or may be born to do it completely—*ohne Hast, doch ohne Rast*. At least this is what I have tried to do.

But at any rate I believe that it has been found possible, in these volumes, to trace and to set forth, with (as I at least hope) a coherence and completeness not easily to be found in any single exposition earlier, a possible and logical life-history of English verse for the last seven centuries, supported throughout by examples of fact, and conforming itself unceasingly and ungrudgingly to this fact and to nothing else. To me it seems that this could not be done by any other system—that all other systems meet and break themselves against irreconcilablenesses of one sort or another in the historic sequence, and that, still more, they meet with constant particular difficulties, which they have to evade by unnecessary and improbable “epicyclic” explanations, or else to leave frankly unsolved, while (as it seems to me also) their particular explanations, when achieved, are constantly at variance with the demands and the

commands of the ear. Of course it is conceivable (though, I own, with great difficulty by me) that there is *no* system—that English prosody is not a natural and orderly development on biological principles, but a succession of haphazards, a drift of unconnected and uncaused atoms, dependent on chance, or individual genius, or definite “copying” from foreign models. If anybody can believe this, I frankly grant that all this book is, in my favourite quotation, “lost labour and light-minded folly.” Otherwise it is not quite that perhaps, but at the worst a confession of faith, arrived at and supported by an exposition of fact. The chief dogma of the creed, and the chief fact discovered and expounded, is the Foot.

And now *quid plura*? I have done what I could to show in this book that the formal part of English poetry is no negligible thing, and that it is still less a thing to be regarded as purely mechanical on one hand or purely haphazard on the other. It is to me the life of poetry—a life which, like other lives, is mysteriously and inextricably blended with other things, but which is still, in a way, separable.

And I have further tried to prove that if this special life is conferred on the bare meaning, it is conferred by Prosody, through its two engines of metre and diction. How these engines have worked, how they have been got ready, especially on the metrical side, how they have been applied and perfected by twenty generations of those greatest benefactors of the world, the poets—I have tried to show. How inadequately I have done it no one can be more conscious than I am. But I know that the causeway under my feet, through whatever floods of doubt and difficulty, “holds hard as wood”, and that those who pursue it will reach the Little Tower of appreciation of poetry, whence no man was ever yet dislodged.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For, as the Judicious Poet writes

The lip of a girl, and the lilt of a verse, and the lap and the lift of the sea—  
Of all the things that the world has seen—of all that ever shall be—  
Of all God's works in heaven and earth, there is nothing to match These Three

At any rate, I may perhaps be allowed to repeat the assurance that the system so perseveringly recommended during this book is no result of casual theoretic whim, forcing fact into accordance with it, nor of obedience (or, what is still more common, opposition), to teaching in early days. I never was taught any system of English prosody, and, as it happened (it may seem odd, but is true), I never read any books on English prosody till long after I had formed my own ideas on the subject. And these ideas were formed and fostered, developed, confirmed, and completed by nothing but the reading of English poetry. Even when—more than twenty years ago perhaps, but at also more than double twenty years of age—I began to read prosodists, I can honestly say that I judged them, not because of their agreement or disagreement with any crystallised system of my own, but simply as they seemed to me to suit or not to suit that same English poetry. I saw, and have seen ever since with increasing clearness, that the pure accentual system is totally inadequate, that the mixed accent and stress systems, with additions of syzygy, or section, or what not, are at the best arbitrary and lacking in universal application, while they often lead to horrible mis-scansion, that this same unpardonable sin of prosody attaches still more to the pure musical systems, that the attempts to go behind the study of construction, and the legitimate analysis of line and stanza-effect, into questions of the origin of value, though no doubt they need not necessarily, do, actually and in practice, lead to error. Comparing and winnowing all these with the constant correction of the actual poetic history and production before me, I have found nothing adequate in the exposition but the foot-system as here explained, and

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And as the Scholast (*style*, as he says modestly, *forsan canino*, but surely with even more than canine sagacity) adds, *Basiationem continuam sustinere difficultimum et quamvis maneat Oceanus, ab Oceano occupationes tuas te revocare et retinere possunt. Sed versus legere aut saltem versuum meminisse, curvis, ut libet, su licet. Voluptatum ergo trium hæc potissima et fidelissima est* (He subjoins a disquisition on *quamvis* with the indicative and subjunctive respectively, which may be omitted)

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I have found this adequate always I have, of course, made many omissions, many awkwardnesses, many positive mistakes But, at least, I have kept, or tried to keep, my eyes steadily on "the eyes of Beatrice"—on the actual face of the actual poetry

## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX I

### WHAT IS A FOOT?

I AM afraid that there may be an appearance of contumacy in the attempt to "crush" (as the *Edinburgh Reviewer*<sup>1</sup> says) all dealing with such subjects as the Principle of Equivalence, the Accent and Quantity battle, and others as well, into the compass of a single appendix of not many pages. My excuses (which perhaps are not excuses at all) must be twofold—one historical, the other philosophical. I never read in history, ancient or modern, of any successful attempt to conciliate enemies when the subject of quarrel was a real one, or of any controversy which did not leave the controversialists very much where they began. And I never read in philosophy, ancient or modern, from the Eleatics to the Neo-Platonists and from the Scholastics to Nietzsche, any two sentences that impressed themselves more upon me than Aristotle's caution against "straying into other kinds," and Hume's warning that inquiries of a certain sort only push ignorance further back. For my own purposes, and to my own thinking, quite enough has been said on the whole subject, or bundle of subjects, in this book already. But it might seem unmannerly towards persons of worth and courtesy to say nothing more, and so I shall say something, though in no sanguine state of mind as to its satisfying anybody.

To my thinking, as I have already stated again and again, the subject of prosody begins where the question of what constitutes prosodic material leaves off. It is no doubt competent for the prosodist to busy himself with that question, just as it is competent for the student of architecture to analyse rocks, and for the student of painting to analyse madder, and cochineal, and lapis-lazuli. But it is not in the slightest degree necessary for him to do so, and it is by no means certain that, in doing so, he will not weaken his grasp of, and divert his attention from, his proper subjects of inquiry. "The mode of ascertaining the

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* p 164



apertures of the teeth," the question whether the *u* in "ugly" is a single sound or an eikosiphthong, and even that whether a "long" syllable is made so by Cause  $\alpha$ , Cause  $\beta$ , or Cause Abracadabra, seem to me—I must apparently say it once more—questions which, whether soluble or insoluble, frivolous or serious in themselves, have as much to do with the question of the admitted "harmony," as far as it goes, of Pope, the questioned "harmony" of Shakespeare and Milton, the generally but not universally given up *in*harmony of Donne, as the petrology of the Portuguese quarries has to do with the style of Batalha, or the chemical analysis of the colours on Velasquez' palette with the victoriousness of the "Venus" or the "Admiral"

It has, however, been objected by the most competent and courteous of critics, Mr Omond, that I have no right to speak of "equivalence" unless I give some principle on which I consider values equivalent. And we have seen a rather remarkable argument (by the *Edinburgh* Reviewer cited more than once), that although equivalence undoubtedly may exist in *time*, it cannot in *accent*. I am indeed not sure that this latter argument is, even in its own division, sound, for whatever accent may be—and there is quite as much fight about this as about other things—it admittedly admits of degrees, and it is difficult to conceive of "unaccentedness" which does not admit of degrees of approach to accentedness. For a pure phonetic zero could not be pronounced at all. With these degrees, expression of "accentedness" in terms of unaccentedness is not inconceivable, and the Reviewer's contention, though ingenious and at first sight plausible, falls through.

Even if it did not, it would do me neither good nor harm, because I do not believe that our verse rests on accent, *as such*. Nor do I believe that it rests on quantity in the strict sense of time—or for the matter of that, that "quantity" itself ever solely rested on time in Greek or Latin. English prosodic value appears to me to be determined—and equivalence to be determined likewise and consequently—by the ear, "*penes quam est jus et norma scandendi*," though the word itself will not scan in the place. The qualifications<sup>1</sup> which the ear admits seem to me to be extremely various, and, like a general passport, not intrinsically sufficient without what it would be a bull to call the immediate *visa* of the ear itself. Literal "length," *i.e.* time of pronunciation, is perhaps the test which fails most seldom, and that is why I like the "quantity" range of terms best. It is very

<sup>1</sup> I should say that there is a certain "transmutation of force" in matters aural, and that time, weight, loudness, sharpness, and some other things take each other's places rather uncannily.

difficult to make a "short" syllable out of one which takes a very long time to pronounce. But "time" will not do exclusively, for it is easy to make a "long" syllable out of one that takes a very short time to pronounce. Accent, as I have said often, will give "acting" quantity, so will emphasis, so will probable loudness or sharpness in actual speech, so will, sometimes, the mere will and skill of the poet, who, by the rush and hurry of his verse, forces you to negotiate the weak landing and taking off places as if they were solid rock, and carries you safe over. But always it is the result *to the ear* which decides.<sup>1</sup> The person whom the King addresses as Esquire or anything else *is* that thing for his life and afterwards. The syllable or sound that the ear accepts as long or short is short or long for its life and afterwards—in that particular place. Beyond this I hold it not merely unsafe to go, but more or less unwise, if not positively futile, and therefore I do not go further myself.

But if the ear is tolerant of all sorts of methods of preparing and qualifying "long" and "short" syllables, provided only that it recognises them as such by "rule of *drum*," it by no means extends this tolerance to the point of laxity in admitting their arrangement anyhow, when they have once qualified. This arrangement is determined by an ascending series of considerations, pertaining as they ascend to different sciences and orders of thought. The first is purely *mathematical*, being the simple possible permutations of "short" and "long." And the fact that the classical foot-names are merely convenient and appropriate labels for these permutations demonstrates the folly of those who object to the use of these names. Let the anti-classicalist rage never so fiercely, he cannot help raging (if he does it in verse) in iambs and trochees, dactyls and anapaests, if he confines himself to prose, in these and a more extensive assortment of the hated terms up to pæons and dochmiacs.

But when this point has been passed, things cease to be so simple, and the genius of the particular language begins to assert itself. Thenceforward there is no real help to be found except in experiment to a certain extent, and to a much larger—an infinitely larger—in that record of past experiment which is called History. You will gain nothing from Phonetics—which, if they are concerned with anything real at all, are concerned with real things previous to the primary process of prosody itself. You will probably be led hopelessly astray by Music—which is another

<sup>1</sup> And the ear sometimes seems to conduct its business on principles almost as liberal as those for which Mr. Bertram commended Dirk Hatteraick to Guy Mannering: 'He'll take wood or he'll take barley, or he'll take just what's convenient at the time.' But not always.

kind from prosody, though dangerously near to it. But if you stick to Prosody herself and to the subject, the poetry of the language with which you are dealing, it will be your own fault if you ever go wrong, though sometimes you may be unable to go positively right, because there are two or more available interpretations of the riddle.

The first and most important "light" which the study of the history of this subject gives you is that from almost the first "syllable of recorded time," when English became fully English, its verse arranges itself—haltingly at first, then in a more and more orderly and soldierly fashion—in certain equivalent groups of syllables themselves, which, in turn, are grouped further into lines. The lesser and more integral groups, which cannot be broken up without breaking up all "verse," are not mere aggregations of accented and unaccented and they are, most particularly and essentially, not haphazard aggregations in respect of the unaccented, or rigid ones in respect of the necessity of the presence of an accent. No such rule as the impropriety of adjacent accentuation really exists, none such as the limitation of accenting to one syllable in a word. When we examine the groups (of syllables furnished, *taliter qualiter*, with long or short value) which form verse satisfactory to the ear, they are, necessarily because mathematically, found to be identical, most commonly and most naturally, with the six commonest of the classically named permutations—iamb, trochee, spondee, anapaest, dactyl, and tribrach. Of these the spondee and dactyl are least common, as a result of the general quantity-character of the language, and the tribrach is slowest in establishing itself, because, no doubt, of the old accentual etiquette of Anglo-Saxon.

All these feet are accepted by a good English ear—as the practice of good English poets should show conclusively even to those whose ear is less delicate and receptive—as constructively *equivalent*, and (subject to further limitations of construction) as *interchangeable*—capable of *substitution*. But English admits this process with greater freedom than does either of the classical languages, though by no means indiscriminately, and, in particular, it possesses a property and privilege which seems to have been unknown to them, that of accepting—not so often as to create confusion, but by no means as a mere exception—*silence for sound*, the pause half-foot or even foot as a recognised expletive of the line. By this licence, and even without it, it possesses *mono-syllabic* feet, which can not merely precede the verse in the fashion of anacrusis, but can also form integral parts of it.

These equivalent groups—which are from one point of view bricks that build up the line, from another, sections into which

it may be resolved, best of all, anatomisable limbs, of which it is composed, but in no sense constituents of a jumbled heap themselves jumbled together—are *Feet*, and by them, and of them, and into them, as I hope to have shown fairly by this time, the whole body of English verse is constituted, consists, and may be resolved. But to go further behind the principle of their equivalence or the principle of their juxtaposition, I hold, once more, to be as useless and as hopeless as to attempt to determine the ultimate laws of beauty and fitness in any æsthetic kind. The ear decides in the one case as the eye does in the other, and the ear laughs at specified anastomoses and phonetic syzygies, speech-waves and pitch-accents, as the eye does at attempts to decide that the distance from the base of the septum of the nose to the handle-place of the Cupid's bow of the lip shall be half, or a third, or whatever it is, of the distance between the lower lip itself and the chin-base.

Observation of individual points is of course possible, and valuable—I hope that there is not a little of it in these volumes, and you can sometimes generalise, though you must do it very cautiously. For instance, there is, I think, no doubt that, unless the poet carries the thing off by the *escamotage* of emphasis or some other special device,<sup>1</sup> a dactyl before an iamb or an anapaest after a trochee is always cacophonous in English. "Of course," says the accentualist, "because there are too many unaccented syllables together." Unfortunately, not only will a tribrach come perfectly well before an iamb or (less well) after a trochee, making *four* "unaccenteds", but two consecutive tribrachs are by no means unthinkable, and may, I believe, be actually found in Tennyson and Mr Swinburne, as well as, with even greater ease, in Browning. In other words, "the foot's the thing", and between the classes and clans of feet, while there is a general *equivalence*, there is by no means an indiscriminate capacity for substitution or willingness to co-habit. The foot is a *person* not a brute concourse of atoms.

To the definition of its social differentia as "isochronism" I have no particular objection, so long as it is not too much forced. I should prefer (and could construct on Aristophanic principles, and even on those of Aristotle's Helot of frigidity, the rhetorician Lycophron) a term expressing "equality and congruity to the ear," and should be liberal on the first score, though by no means indifferent, and pretty strict on the latter, though with a strictness very hard to define. The liberality is of classical ancestry, for it is an old commonplace of the subject that, putting

<sup>1</sup> As, for instance, in the "name-strinza" of "The Blessed Damozel" (*v. sup.*), where, however, "Margaret" is not *indisputably* an integral dactyl.

aside *degrees* of shortness and length, an anapæst or a spondee or a dactyl can never, in strict *time*, equal an iamb or a trochee. But our strictness, though less easily put into rule, is really much less inferior to that of the ancient prosodies than half-scholars like Archdeacon Evans (*v sup* p 293) have thought. (If the reader will refer to the remarks in the text on Waller, Cowley, and some others he will see the justification of this.) And one of the main differences between the historical and the *a priori* modes of attacking prosody is that, while the latter as a rule applies impossible scansion to good verses, the former, by proper examination and comparison, detects the badness of bad.

I have made an absolutely clean breast of my views, and of the points on which—*per vultate* doubtless—I decline to take a view of what seems to me invisible, and I do not think it necessary to say much more on the subject. In the course of my examination of English poetry I have found (1) that the attempt to explain its structure by accented and unaccented syllables is certainly inadequate, is in all probability wrong, and constantly leads to not probable but certain error, (2) that, something different and something more being wanted, this something is adequately supplied by the admission, as the constituents of the structure, of certain entities, themselves composed either of sound-syllables, contrasted in value, or of silence-spaces, interchangeable within limits and conditions, componible further into groups, corresponding or contrasted, which can be yet further compounded on principles of correspondence and contrast. These last I call couplets or stanzas, or, in the special case of blank verse, paragraphs, the middle combinations I call lines or verses, the first I call feet. And it is with the way in which the three have manifested and behaved themselves, for the last seven or eight hundred years, that this book concerns itself.

I am forced, when I consider these matters, to ask myself whether a considerable number of persons who use the word "foot" really know what that word means, and to answer the question evasively by confessing that, if they do, I do not. A foot is not to me, as it is, for instance, to Professor Lewis,<sup>1</sup> with whom I have in some other points little to quarrel about, a mere mathematical fraction of a line-total. It is a member of a line-body. It is not, as it apparently is with many, a fixed number of fixed syllables, but that I have explained sufficiently. It is not something borrowed from Greek and Latin. But these points of variety in acception are as nothing to another. When I use the word "foot" generally, and the words "iamb," "trochee," etc, specifically, I take them as something real. An

<sup>1</sup> *V sup* p 503

iamb—let us take the common value  $\bar{i}t\bar{u}m$ —is to me a prosodic entity, which, whether it is entirely comprised in the same word or made up of more than one, or parts of more than one, is a prosodic *integer*, with a character, variable in degree but invariable in essence, of its own. It is prosodically separated (again with degrees) from its neighbours, it is prosodically united (again with degrees) in itself. So with a trochee ( $\bar{t}u\bar{m}i\bar{t}$ ) and others. Further, these feet give, to a line of which they are the basis, a character corresponding (still with degrees) to their own, and this character varies with them. Let us take the very beautiful, very characteristic, and, as it happens, very regular line from *Romeo and Juliet*

And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars

This line, as far as it is possible to represent its sound-scansion diagrammatically, represents to me something like this

ious stars  
auspic  
of in  
the yoke  
And shake

the scan-rise being, of course, exaggerated—to strike—in the diagram. The trochee-people's scansion (see next article) I am unable to represent to my mind by anything but

And  
shake the  
yoke of  
inaus  
picious  
stars,

which, even after allowing for the same exaggeration, appears to me ludicrous, hideous, and false. But this is because the feet are real things to me, and not merely *ad libitum* spoonfuls of syllables.

Of these kinds there were much to be said, for, by stress of art or frolic of the Muses, we may achieve divers feet. I am prepared to meet and greet a pyrrhic, though I do not know that as yet, in some experience of English poetical society, I have ever yet had that pleasure. The very long or four-syllabled feet, which some think to have already been made *hoffuhig*, I rather doubt as yet, in serious and fully accomplished work, and I can generally explain them otherwise, but I have not the least objection to accept them when the poets shall have established them in that position. The amphibrach is a masquerade foot:

it is generally, if not always, something that has put on a vizard and a domino for the occasion, and when you go home with it you find it be an old friend. Two others are in different case. The spondee is not so rare as is thought, but it is a foot "of occasion," and the necessity of making it something more is one of the drawbacks of the so-called English hexameter. And the same remark extends to the dactyl, though sometimes it naturalises itself, or perhaps you do not care to examine its papers too narrowly. It is most at home when chaperoned by the trochee.

But still there abide these three—iamb, trochee, and anapæst—in the English aristocracy of poetry. The iamb is with us the staple of poetic life. It will do any work, take on any colour, prove itself at need the equal of either of the other two, which it often summons to reinforce it. The trochee is the passion of life, not easily adaptable by itself, except for special moments, comic or tragic, frivolous or plaintive, as it chooses, but seasoning and inspiring the iamb constantly and yet strangely. And the anapæst is the glory of life, though its uses differ in glory. When a man knows how to use these three, there is little left for *him to know, though there is infinitely much left for him to devise and do*. Beyond them, for constant and necessary use, in seven centuries of experiment, no man has yet gone, neither, I think, in seven or seventy more, shall any go.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As an aid to the comparison of foot-scansion with scansion by stress and section let us take one of the greatest lines in modern, and English poetry, the finale of "Lusus Veneris."

The thun|der of | the trum|pets of | the night

Foot-scansion gives me what I have indicated, for, as I have remarked in this excursus, and shall in the next, I utterly decline

The | thunder | of the | trumpets | of the | night

Stress and section-scansion would, I suppose, give me

The thunder of | the trumpets of | the night,

or

The thunder | of the trumpets | of the night,

or, just conceivably,

The thunder of the | trumpets | of the night

I can see no fourth possibility

Now these arrangements have some superficial merits. In fact I should not object to the second myself, as indicative of what I have called the fingering of the poet, while the first, though inferior, has the advantage of bringing out suddenly "the night"—the night that cometh. But let it be observed that though these are themselves comparatively unobjectionable as rhetorical adjustments of the line itself, *they give no clue to anything else*. You are not one whit forwarder with any other line for them, whereas the foot-scansion (to which you can easily add this, and something similar in other cases, while you often want

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nothing more) is a key to every good line in the English language, and shows you how all are good. And I think I may, though declining examination in detail of Mr Bridges' "stress-prosody" here, point out that he has come to allow "stress-feet," including a kind of amphibrach called a "britannic," and admitting sorts up to a practical molossus. I cannot always make them work, and I can almost always make feet of the usual kind work better, but the concession, in such a quarter, of the practical insufficiency of stress-by-itself-stress is immense.



## APPENDIX II

### IS THE BASE-FOOT OF ENGLISH IAMB OR TROCHÉE ?

THE question mooted above is one on which I myself have no doubts, and one which, intrinsically, I should not choose for discussion. But I have been asked to say something on it, and there are certain circumstances which give it a claim to attention. To begin with, the pretensions of the trochée have had, at different times, no small amount of backing, sometimes from not negligible persons. In the second place, the dubiety—unjustified as I think it—connects itself with some very important features of prosodic inquiry in the past. But its most important title-deed is a “black-letter” one—to use the term as it is used in speaking of a “black-letter lawyer”.

There certainly *was* a time when the metrical basis of English poetry, so far as it had any, was trochaic. The trochaic cadence sounds—if any foot-cadence does—in the whole body of Anglo-Saxon verse proper until the break-up, or the experimental advances (whichever name be preferred), of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Nothing but Guest’s determination to have naught to do with anything in the least connected with “the rhythm of the foreigner,” or with a nomenclature associated with quantity, can have prevented so careful a student of Anglo-Saxon verse from noticing this. But it is exceedingly improbable that many modern favourers of the trochée can have been influenced by such a consideration, and probably most of them have been ignorant of the fact.

On the other hand, the rather numerous prosodic students who cannot rid themselves of the notion that music is the thing to help them, are naturally enough impeded, by the *anacrusic* fashion of scansion which music suggests, to “see trochees” as freely as another class of persons sees snakes. Moreover, the peculiar fashion in which iambic and trochaic measures intermix, set to each other, and carry out a complicated country-dance, might not unreasonably prompt the question, “Why is one of

the partners to be preferred above the other? And if one is to be preferred, why not the trochee?"

Plenty of causes can be shown, but to the present writer, on the principles of the present book, one seems sufficient—the extreme rarity of sustained trochaic rhythm, without admixture or external support, in English poetry, and its very dubious success, except in short passages, where it is attempted. In the older poets, whether in great examples like those of Milton or pleasant ones like those of Wither, when it does not frankly beg an arm of the iambic, it constantly adopts the catalectic form, which is nearly as much iambic as trochaic. "Virgin daughter of Locrine" will lose two-thirds of its beauty if you make it "Locrinus," and "Makes the desolatest place" will be absolutely spoilt, or at least made half-comic, if you make it "places," the filling in in each case giving a suggestion of "rocking-horse," if not of positive burlesque. On the other hand, the finest piece of almost pure trochees in English, the "Passage of the Fountain" in Tennyson's "Vision of Sin," is not quite pure—the foot expanding into dactyls now and then—and is short, ending too, usually, though not always, with catalexis. The monotony of the long-continued trochaic measure of *Hiawatha* is notorious, and, even by those who do not dislike the poem, undeniable.

On the contrary, it is almost superfluous to say that the continuous iamb is always at home, and never requires any variation (except for the mere pleasure of change) or support of any kind. To get the vast armies, the innumerable multitudes of it that exist in English, into trochaic form, or in most cases even into a suggestion of trochaic rhythm, you have to play the most gratuitous, unliterary, and unnatural tricks upon them, and you often produce positively ludicrous or nauseous results. The decided majority of prosodic opinion on the point comes to reinforce the *prima facie* custom of poetic practice, and the undoubted primogeniture of the trochee is sufficiently disposed of (except in the view of Guestes) by the great change which came upon the language at the passing of Old and the coming of Middle English. We have seen how even the revival of alliterative-accentual rhythm, though it galvanised the trochaic run to some extent, failed to maintain this, and passed over to the anapæst, or something very like it.

Never, therefore, will it be justifiable to wrench, not the accent, but the rhythmical cadence, of the mass of English verse from "rising" to "falling." In fact one of the strongest arguments against doing so is that it would obscure and deaden the *true* trochaic rhythm, when it is wanted for contrast, or in its rarer employment as staple metre. Yet there may be something

more to say, though it is very difficult to say it politely. Some of these trochaisers seem to me to be prosodically rhythm-deaf as other persons are physically colour-blind. Professor Alden, in that valuable and interesting book to which I have only been able to make a bare reference above, thinks that the distinction, not only of iambic and trochaic, but of anapæstic and dactylic, is "superficial"—that it depends "not on the nature of the rhythm concerned, but on where we begin to count a measure", that "We met a host and quelled it" has "the *same* rhythm" whether you take the extra syllable at the end or the beginning. He says further, in connection with my remarks on "Boadicea," "No one has yet shown how the difference in *naming* and *dividing* feet can change the rhythm." Now this is to me passing strange. My own preference for iambic over trochaic rhythm in the great mass of English verse may be right or wrong. It is possible that Shakespeare's and Milton's blank verse, scanned trochaically, may not be so absurd or so hideous as it seems to me. But to say that the two scansiones are the *same* rhythm, seems to me as though a man should say that blue is the same as orange. They may be the same musically or mathematically. I do not pretend to be a musician, and my last mathematical distinction was attained about half a century ago. That, prosodically, they are utterly different, my ear informs me, without phrase and without appeal.

Nor do I think that the critic whose suggestion principally determined this excursus (the reviewer of Vol. I in the Literary Supplement of *The Times*, June 29, 1906) intended to dispute this. He bases his (partial) support of the trochee on the trochaic *diathesis* (let me clear him of using the word) of our ordinary speech, and on the large interspersion of trochees in older (he admits they are not so common in modern) verse. Now I think I should answer, in the first place, that, even if we admit the first plea (which I hardly do), the rhythm of poetry is pretty notoriously *different* from that of ordinary conversation—it might almost be said that *ξένωσις*, as opposed to *κυριώτης*, is the beginning of poetry from one point of view. But I should not lay much stress on this. In the second, I should say that the very facts of the large sprinkling of trochaic rhythm, and of its effectiveness, are occasioned by the other fact that it is *not* the staple—and so is invaluable for variety. But the reviewer's most dangerous and *retorsible* contention is, I think, that "poets who are dominated by the theory that [the basis] is iambic will make bad decasyllabic verses," which he supports by referring to the badness or dulness of eighteenth-century verse. Now I should not myself say that eighteenth-century verse was

either exactly bad or exactly dull. It was painfully *limited*, but its limits arose, not from the notion of the iambic basis, but from the notion that that basis was invariable. The trochee is the most valuable variant—the anapæst itself being rather an extension than a variation—and if you make it the basis you lack the wisdom of that Frenchman who did not marry his mistress, lest he should have no place where to spend his evenings.

Let me add that the admission of a trochaic basis would bring with it the almost fatal inconvenience that the chief, if not the only trisyllabic substitute, would be the dactyl. Anapæsts simply refuse, and tribrachs yield with doubtful grace. Now if there is one thing settled by the enormous majority of competent witnesses, of the most different prosodic complexions, from Ascham to Mr Swinburne, it is the danger and difficulty of the dactyl in English.

Such (in addition to what has been said at the beginning of this excursus) are some of the considerations which I should offer to my critic. A full working out of the question would require a monograph, and the monograph, to make it complete, would almost require a special boiling-down of these three volumes.

## APPENDIX III

### TRISYLLABIC METRES SINCE 1600

SOMETHING more was promised, in a slip-note of the last volume, as to the development of the trisyllabic metres before their definite establishment in the seventeenth century. As we saw, Gascoigne was quite wrong when, thirty or forty years before the beginning of that century, he limited (though with regret) English feet to the iambic, and there is no need to recapitulate the overwhelming evidence of his mistake which was accumulated in Vol I. But it cannot be denied that the scanty presence of the trisyllabic *measure*, as distinguished from the trisyllabic *foot*, in the abundant production of Elizabethan lyric, is somewhat curious, and that the clog and hamper which beset such things as Cleveland's "Mark Antony" and "Square-Cap," and as Waller's "Saraband" verses, seem to require some explaining. The two first in particular demand examination. "Mark Antony" is a curious piece (or rather pair of pieces) which has shocked precisians, because Cleveland chose to burlesque himself, very much as Thackeray did in the "Willow Song" of *Ottelia* two centuries later. Here is the first stanza of the serious part—the "Mock Song" has nothing different for us

When as | the night | ingale | chanted | her vespers,  
 And the | wild for | ester | couched on | the ground,  
 Venus | in vi | ted me | in th' ev | ning whispers  
 Unto | a fra | grant field | with ro | ses crown'd,  
     Where she | before | had sent  
     My wi | shes' com | plement,  
 Unto | my heart's | content  
 Played with | me on | the green  
     Never | Mark An | tony |  
     Dallied | more wan | tonly |  
     With the fair | Egyp | tian Queen

Now to modern ears and eyes the opening line suggests, and the chorus or refrain (which is in every stanza) confirms, the trisyllabic scansion represented by the dotted division. But the said ears and eyes must, if they are at all sensitive, be soon "pulled up"

into dubiety as the dissyllabic (or straight division) alternative occurs. And it may be further noticed that *while every line, without exception, admits the latter without the slightest difficulty, an actual majority of lines go better to it and rather ill to the other*. The last line of all, indeed, almost refuses a dactylic arrangement,

which would make Egyptian necessary, though "with the fair" can go with either measure. Lines 3 and 4 go much better iambically, lines 5-8 at least as well, lines 9 and 10 hardly, if at all, worse. And it is the same with the rest. For instance—

• Wanting a glass to plait her ample tresses

is a most beautiful heroic line with redundance, but a very clumsy dactylic or anapaestic dimeter, while

Numbering of kisses arithmetic prove,

which may seem decisive one way, inclines rather the other when one remembers that "arithmetic" has abundant, if not preponderant, authority and example at the time. Still the quatrain in which it occurs and the three previous lines—

Mystical grammar of amorous glances,  
Feeling of pulses, the physic of love,  
Rhetorical courtings and musical dances,

are certainly more suggestive of a trisyllabic base than of any other.

This becomes undoubted in "Square-Cap," a pleasant variation on the old "Phyllis and Flora" theme

Come hither, Apollo's bouncing girl !  
And in a whole Hippocrène of sherry,  
Let's drink a round till our brains do whirl,  
Tuning our pipes to make ourselves merry  
A Cambridge lass, Venus like horn of the froth  
Of an old half-filled jug of barley broth,  
• She, she, is my mistress, her suitors are many,  
But she'll have a Square-Cap, if she have any

There is, I say, no doubt about this, which is quite evidently suggested by, and intended for, one of the many convivial tunes in triple time. But how about the other? Even if an exact tune were discovered for it, it is evident that it would go—in parts—very badly to that tune if it were generally triple. Now what is, on the one hand the meaning, on the other the lesson, of all this?

Meaning and lesson, I think, come together in the supposition that the poet was not clear, in his own head, what he was writing or what he wanted to write. He had got—from music doubtless—trisyllabic suggestions. But he had the habit of writing in

dissyllabic measure, and he could not entirely get out of it—was perpetually falling back into it,—and so, on the whole, produced a muddle—a muddle which was itself to produce the beautiful followings of Dryden (*v. sup.* II 373), but a muddle clearly

On the other hand, there is no muddle about Waller's "Hylas and Chloris"

Hylas ! O Hylas ! why sit we mute,  
Now that each bird saluteth the spring ?

And why? Because the piece is avowedly written "to a 'Saraband,'" and the musical and prosodic music happen to correspond so closely that there is no going wrong for a skilled prosodist, who was probably also a not unskilled musician, like Waller. But in 1645, from which this seems to date at latest, as "Mark Antony" does from two years later, a definite musical *garde-fou* seems to have been required, to keep at least minor poets straight

And even so there is still noticeable, for a long time to come, a certain absence of perfect freedom and ease. Waller does not jumble and hybridise his metre as Cleveland does, but he has nothing like the triumphant sweep of "A Hundred Years Hence," or of the best things in Dryden—still less of the consummate and well-bred ease of the metre in Prior. Nay more, he has not got these qualities to even the same extent as the anonymous authors of

My truest treasure so traitorly taken  
and

Alas ! that ever the speech was spoken

had it, so far back as the fifteenth, and probably the early fifteenth, century, and as anybody has at least been able to have it (if he chose and chooses) since Prior himself

Now the reason of this is not very far to seek, but it has been too seldom recognised, and it is of the very greatest importance to our inquiry. For it shows—in regular progress and exactly as it *ought* to show—the passing of that eclipse of trisyllabic scansion which was due to the breakdown of regular metrical rhythm in the later fifteenth century. This eclipse weighs on the heavier and duller eyes of the preceptists from Gascoigne to Bysshe, but the acuter organs of the poet pierce the penumbra and anticipate the final emergence. Nor need there be the slightest hesitation in recognising the part which music plays in couching the poetic vision. The fact is that, though music can be quite dispensed with by poets—as in the famous instances of Shelley and Scott—it seldom or never does them much harm. *Their* Muse saves them from any mistake of her, for her little sister. Nor is that sister really to blame for the blunders of the prosodists. For it is

not music so much as musical science, falsely so called—a very different thing,—that deludes people like Steele and Lanier. They flirt with the governess, not with the damsel: they ink themselves with the symbols of crotchet and quaver, instead of listening to the sounds which those symbols translate or only accompany. Let it be again and again repeated that the immense and wonderful development of later Elizabethan and seventeenth-century lyric can hardly be separated from the almost universal practice of actual song—that vocal and instrumental music served at once as solvent of the old impediments and as menstruum to the new fluency. Some innocent preceptists of the musical school have thought to get confessions out of the constant use of the word “music” as applied to verse by critics, including the present humble historian. There is, of course, nothing in the slightest degree compromising in such use. Musical music and poetical music—let it be repeated, if necessary, a thousand times—are different things. They can live quite comfortably apart: they can live happily and delightfully together. The very reason of this possibility of delightful cohabitation is their difference, and to confound their laws and nature is to ignore the foundation of their compatibility. But that music itself—music practical—has sometimes helped prosody mightily, the subject of this excursus proves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I do not think it necessary to enter into the controversy which has been raised on the point whether anapaests and dactyls exemplify “duple” or “triple” time. It is a pretty clear example of the confusion produced by mixing two modes of addressing the same lady. What anapaests and dactyls may be musically concerns me not. Prosodically, whether continuous or used in substitution, they are always “triple” = “divided into three parts.”—As this book draws to an end, I remember more and more points on which I should like to draw attention. One of these, closely connected with the subjects of the present Appendix and of No. VI, is the curious fragment of an English *Song of Roland* (Lausdowne MSS. 388), printed in E. E. S. *English Charlemagne Romances*, Part II (London, 1880). See also Ward, *Catalogue of Romances*, 1. 631. It is in perhaps more definite anapaestic-iambic dimeter couplets than anything else attributed to the fifteenth century and sometimes reminds one strikingly of Spenser’s “February,” etc. (v. 125f.)



## APPENDIX IV

RHYME, 1600-1900

ONE of the most favourite occupations of what I have called "scholarship"—meeting in consequence with a mild protest from some worthy ones at the inverted commas—is the tabling of rhymes. This process indeed provides a very large part of the monographs which, in Germany and elsewhere, obtain for the monographers the title of Doctor. I have often wished to hear Molière on the subject—not, of course, that the study of rhyming sounds, and of the letters which answer to those sounds, is at all a ridiculous thing, but that it easily lends itself to ridiculous treatment. We are very much obliged to the person, whoever he was, who first drew attention to "Great Anna" and the rhyme of "obey" and "tea" which occurs in her company. But the precise number of times in which "love" and "dove" occur coupled in the works of a given poet is a fact not very fruitful.

Undoubtedly, however, it is an important part of prosodic study to note rhymes which, usual at one time, are unusual at another, rhymes exceptional even at their time, and those which, apparently licentious, can be brought under some sort of rule. On the whole the continuity of English, in the respects indicated by rhyme, is extremely remarkable, and goes far to negative the idea that, except in accent (where there certainly have been considerable changes, introduced mainly, it would seem, between the early fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries), there has been any great alteration. But changes in accent there have been undoubtedly, and there have been some remarkable changes in vowel-value. These last, of course, are evidenced in rhyme, but we must not mistake the evidence. It is rather easy to mistake it in some cases.

For instance, I saw not long ago over, if not a signature, initials of weight, the suggestion that Tennyson made "Cophetua" rhyme to "say," because he had been taught to pronounce it so. He had some peculiarities, but without positive evidence I

should be slow to believe this. No well-bred Englishman ever was taught within the nineteenth century to call "Attila" "Attilay," or to address his sisters or his ladyloves as "Barbaray," "Mariay," etc. Vulgansm—old probably as well as new—might say "Attiler," "Barbarer," "Marier," and to avoid it precision might exaggerate "Attilah," "Barbarah," "Manah," but these two last things equally reject the *ay*. Moreover, let us look back a couple of hundred years, and we shall find Chamberlayne rhyming his heroine alternately "Pharonniday" and "Pharonnidaw" (cf. "basha" for "pasha," "la!" pronounced "law!" the interchangeableness of "Ha! Ha!" and "Haw! Haw!" etc.)

Let us shift examples of the problem before advancing a solution. In an example cited in the text, from a fairly careful writer, we find "ees" rhyming to "eace." Dryden himself rhymes "traveller" indifferently, as if it were itself "travellar" and "travellour." Words ending in "y," though purists object, are notoriously equated by the very best poets to those which terminate now in an *i* sound, now in an *e*. Extravagant liberties like Pope's well-known "Satires" and "Dedicators" should perhaps be excluded from consideration, but it may be that one key will unfasten the whole range of locks.

That key is not what some would make it—a picklock rather than a key—the stigmatising of English generally as a language of slur and confused vocalisation. (In ill-trained mouths it may tend to be so, just as other languages in similar circumstances tend to intolerable drawling, to headlong gabble, or to sharp and yelping whines and cries.) The key is the observation and application of a real law—the law that *any letter, or combination of letters, may, for rhyming purposes, take in one word the sound that it bears in another*. Thus *er* in "Derby," "Cherwell," "clerk," has the sound of *ar*, and Dryden accordingly rhymes "travellers" to "stars." *Ea* in "break" and "great" itself has the simple *a* sound, and *tea* thus becomes a pair for "obey"—*not* because it was regularly pronounced "tay," for it will be found with the *ee* rhyme in Prior, great Anna's own servant, and a master of rhyme as of rhythm. It is astonishing how many apparently loose rhymes are regularised if this law is remembered. And it evidently accounts for the "Cophetua" rhyme without necessitating the gratuitous and, on the whole, improbable supposition that Tennyson ever pronounced it "Cophetuary," whatever Chamberlayne might have done.

In some other cases eccentric pronunciation *is* required to account for rhyme. In Caroline poetry, for instance, we often find "guess," and even other words of the same termination, rhymed to "flesh" or "mesh." But then we know that "guesh"

is not merely a spoken but a written dialectic variation. The eccentricities arising from the retention of French and Latin accentuation, or even from that of French forms, require but a little knowledge to prevent any surprise at them, and, generally speaking, it will be found, except in extreme and mostly deliberate oddities such as those of Butler and Swift, that abnormality of rhyme is more apparent than real.

On the other hand, the period sees—this very deliberation in oddity is an evidence of it—a great advance in liberty of handling rhyme. Chaucer himself had not been at all prudish in this matter, as the “saveth” and “significavit” of the Prologue will show. But Spenser’s elaborate system of eye-rhymes, and the extension of double or feminine rhymes from the great body of words with a final valued *e* to others with short final syllables of more substantial character, opened wide doors. Insensibly, however, there grew up (or rather strengthened) the English aversion to *identical* rhymes, and though there never appeared anything like the French system of masculine and feminine *alternation*, there is no doubt that, pretty early, the advantage to be obtained from the judicious *intermixture* of single and double rhymes forced itself upon our poets. The pestilent “rhyming dictionary” was sure to make its appearance before long, and did so. But even this, though it could hardly have anything but a bad effect on poetry, helped to record the actual sound of rhymes at the time when the books were written.

To consider the effects of special dialectic or other prepossessions on the rhymes of individual poets would be for monographs on these poets, not for the present History. But something on the general subject of “assonance,” or imperfect rhyme generally, may be reasonably expected. The leading case of Mrs. Browning has been sufficiently dealt with, and there it is quite clear that it was one of partially and strangely defective ear. But recently *assonance proper*—that is to say, correct vowel-rhyme unsupported by consonants—has found defenders, some of whom have been noticed in the text.

As to this, it seems superfluous to do more than repeat that, up to the present day, English has been curiously and obstinately rebel to this form of repeating sound. At the time when French poetry had most original and constructive influence, that poetry was very largely assonant, but ours would have none, or next to none of it, the examples since have been few, and never authoritative, and to this hour I do not know a single poem of any importance or any excellence in the kind. It seems to me probable that this is due to the comparative absence of either sharp or broad vowel-sounds in the English that became, and has

remained, standard and literary<sup>1</sup> We want the consonants to enforce distinct similarity of sound. But the *διότι* does not much matter the *στ* remains

There can be, on the whole, no question that, during these three centuries, the importance of rhyme has been largely, immensely, increased in English The great position assumed by rhymeless verse in the case of "blanks" does not at all militate against this, for that position was secured almost entirely in the semi-poetic province of the drama, and it has maintained itself, outside the drama, only in narrative verse, and in things which have a mono-dramatic or soliloquial quality Recent attempts at more varied dispensing with rhyme have, to speak frankly, been either utter failures or more or less interesting *tours de force* But a word or two may be said on the experiments in repeating rhyme within the line

So far as these are confined to middle and end—or in very long compound lines to practically the two first thirds of the line and the end—they have every justification, both historic and of the result This was the way rhyme actually arose in English it has right prescriptive But internal rhyme, at other than these natural pauses, stands on rather a different footing Such a debauch as Mr Swinburne's famous "our sad, bad, glad, mad brother" is, of course, half playful—a deliberate orgie—and I do not know that Mr Browning's end-jingles in dissyllabic feet are very desirable, though Mr Swinburne's trisyllabic ones could not be spared On the whole, rhyme should come at the end of something<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An illustration of what I mean will be found by comparing the standard and literary transliterations of Indian names, Kurrachee, Mogul or Mogol etc., with the new fangled pedantries of Karachi, Mug-hal etc Another, from another side may be found in the somewhat greater assonantal tendency of Scots

<sup>2</sup> I may perhaps be permitted to express my gratification at the fact that the Oxford Dictionary has, let us hope, put an end to that queer little pedantry of the last twenty or thirty years, the proscription of "rhyme" and prescription of "rime" Etymologically, as some people have always known, it is "fight dog, fight bear" with the odds on the good old dog, for our word is pretty certainly not from the A S *rim* at all, but from the French *rime* which is again pretty, if not quite, certainly *rhythmus* From the point of view of literature and common sense it is enough to say that "rime" in English is preoccupied by "hoar-frost," and that, if there is one clear canon in the obscure business of spelling, it is that different meanings of the same sound to the ear should, if possible, have different forms to the eye

## APPENDIX V

### ALLITERATION AND VOWEL-MUSIC, 1600-1900

IT does not seem necessary to follow the precedent of Vol I so exactly as to give separate appendices to all the general phenomena of English verse during the last three centuries which were there handled. An appendix on Metre in particular would merely summarise large parts of the last two volumes, and what has to be said generally about Feet has been given in the first of the present batch, with a special bearing. On Alliteration and Vowel-Music, however, there may be room for some general remarks, though, in regard to the latter head especially, they have also been to no small extent anticipated.

The curious fates of alliteration in English are probably better known than most fortunes prosodic. More than once banned, it has never been banished, you would have to bleed English "to the white," and supply an entirely new transfusion of foreign blood, before you got rid of it. The Elizabethans talked disdainfully of "hunting the letter," but hardly one of them really abstained from it, and some revelled and wallowed in the practice. The triumph of the stopped couplet represented a set of taste adverse to it in a way, yet the strong antithetic turn of this positively favoured alliteration, and some of Dryden's weightiest lines, some of those evidently "got with a greater gust," exhibit it. Nay, it had such attraction for him that he not only used *twice*<sup>1</sup> the line—

Drawn to the dregs of a democracy,

but had actually borrowed this line itself, and concentrated its letter-hunting, from an earlier writer. Nor did Pope, who might have seemed likely to disdain it, refrain from its use. But the

<sup>1</sup> *Abs and Ach* 227, *Hind and Panther*, 1 212. The original in that *Lacrymae Musarum* for Lord Hastings, to which he had himself contributed, is

It is decreed we must be *drained*, I see,  
Down to the dregs of a democracy

general principles of eighteenth-century poetry were averse to it as a species of "false wit," and Bysshe bars it expressly.

I do not know that the first Romantic school can be said to have made this one of the firmest notes of its reaction, though it is significant that alliteration is strongly apparent in Coleridge and Shelley, but in the second and third divisions of nineteenth-century poetry it became increasingly prominent. Probably no one ever used it more, and abused it less, than Tennyson. Browning revelled in it, and Mr Swinburne's indulgence was one of the chief features of his prosody that impressed themselves upon the general. In fact it is undoubtedly one of the most powerful, as it is one of the most popular, instruments at the disposal of the English poet, though, like most things of the kind, it is dangerous. There is no more artful aid, but it is certain that than an inept alliteration nothing is inept.

It is, however, in the article of Vowel-Music that the history calls for the most distinct and notable summarising. I hope I have made it clear that nobody need expect from me that fatuous confidence in our being better than our fathers, which is the mark of vulgar minds and vulgar epochs. There is, as I have pointed out, exquisite vowel-music in mediæval poetry, but the instrument was in the making, and the players were mostly unaware even of the powers that it had already developed. Shakespeare divides with Aeschylus and Dante the position of master word-musician of the world, and Spenser, if he never rises quite to Shakespeare's altitudes, more constantly affects this peculiar appeal, and is uniformly successful in it. Milton on the one side, and the crowd of Caroline lyrics on the other, do wonders with it, and his must be a pitifully limited ear which cannot hear and rejoice in the trumpet of Dryden and the clarinet of Pope. Still, with the exception of Spenser, Milton, and perhaps some of the minor Carolines, it may be questioned whether any of these employed the instrument very consciously or deliberately—of Shakespeare I have several times declared my steadfast determination never to say what he did or did not do consciously. But the theories, no less than the abilities, of the eighteenth century were disposed to close it, and lock its case. Shenstone might perceive, if he could not fully exemplify, the superior beauty of full rhymes, Gray might accomplish a low and moderated, Collins a higher and more varied, harmony of sound-note, but while few had the organ, hardly anybody would have cared to use it. Good sense and right reason were independent of the mouthing out of *o's* and *a's*. In fact, if the stopped decasyllabic couplet is the be-all and end-all of verse, you cannot have much vowel-music, your best will be the short,

if full-throated, trumpet-blares of Dryden, and those shriller clarionettries of Pope which have been mentioned

But, when the tide of taste turned, there was nothing more certain than that vowel-music would be eagerly practised and (by degrees, if not at once) made a principal method of appeal. It makes, indeed, the larger part of that attack on the definite auditory faculty which has been noted. It is wonderful, if elusive and improvised, in Blake, hardly less wonderful, if more sophisticated, in Coleridge. Nothing is more curious than the perfection of it in the few greatest passages (such, especially, as that in "Yew-Trees," quoted above) of Wordsworth, who theoretically regarded it as a matter of course, something that you get with Judgment and Observation, like a coupon for cheap jewellery with a pound of tea. As for Shelley, he ranks with Spenser and almost with Shakespeare, but it appears to me that the deliberate using of it begins (or nearly so) with Keats, and it was certainly from Keats that Tennyson learnt his marvellous conception and execution in it. Since Tennyson our poets may be said to have regularly schooled themselves in it—even the occasional cacophony of some later writers is a homage of sedition, a sort of barring-out, which acknowledges, in opposing, the existence of a master. Browning used it for spherulic harmony, and for the devil's tattoo, and for everything between them, just as he pleased, and the great poets of the "Prae-Raphaelite" school employed sound just as they employed colour, with deliberate and accomplished craftsmanship.

Of the beauties and delights of it so much has been said incidentally in the pages of the text that there cannot be need to say much more. It is, indeed, the very light of prosody, though, as in the case of feet, we must remember that *mere* vowel-sound without its consonantal consorts is, like mere accent or stress without their opposites, an imperfect and almost soulless thing. But what is rather curious is, that accomplishment in its use excites, among those who cannot taste it, a singular and ludicrous indignation. They often seem to wish to expend upon it—and sometimes actually do—the complimentary language which poor John Davidson bestowed upon rhyme—nay, to extend that language to a quite prophetic strain of abuse, utilising the vocabulary of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse. Well, let them rave, and let us enjoy

## APPENDIX VI

### AN OMNIBUS BOX<sup>1</sup>

#### A *The Prosody of Langland, Lydgate, and the "Kings Quair"*

It is no part of my business to enter at any length into the dispute as to separation of the authorship of *Piers Plowman*, but it would, I think, after what I have said in Vol I, be somewhat pusillanimous not to add that the whole prosodic evidence, as I read it, is against that separation. The revived alliterative metre is a thing not very easy to classify by hard and fast enumerations and differences, but its varieties are by no means difficult to appreciate by careful reading and a practised ear. I myself discern a distinct individuality in the form prevailing in all versions of *Piers Plowman*, as compared with other poems from *William of Palerne* and *Cleanness* to the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century examples, and the variations and progressions which I indicated here, long before the idea of separation was made public (I have been expecting it for many years) are quite consistent with the natural development of that individuality. They are, on the other hand, almost unthinkable regarded as exhibitions in the work of different men, even if pursuing a common object and starting from a single archetype. If the prosody of the bulk of "A," "B," and "C" is the work of five, or three, or even two, different poets, it presents a phenomenon which is nowhere else in English poetry, which is contrary to all observed working of natural laws in the subject, and which is, in fact, a miracle—not, as I so often use the word, in the sense of something admirable, but in the sense of something supernatural and anti-natural.

Some additions of curious and contrasted interest have also been made to the matter available for discussing the prosody of Lydgate and that of James I—two things which have always

<sup>1</sup> I have fashioned this as a convenient receptacle for notes on general or specific points, too long for *Addenda* and *Corrigenda*, but not quite long enough for distinct Appendices. The arrangement is roughly chronological, but not meticulously so.



presented themselves oddly side by side in the study of the Chaucerians. We are now told that we must not reckon "London Lickpenny" as Lydgate's, chiefly because there are no final *e*'s. This seems most remarkably to ignore the statement in the MS which Professor Skeat has followed as best—that it was made "*about year ago*" and is "*newly overseen and amended*". One would hardly expect final *e*'s in such a version, even from the strictest point of view of philologists. But the piece has always seemed to me incredibly lively and terse for the Monk of Bury.

The other point is much more curious. I am told that some further examination of the only MS of the *Quair* has thrown the gravest doubt on the regular existence there of the final *e*'s, which, we used to be told, distinguish it. This would, of course, injure the "regularity" of its prosody, but certainly not make it less likely to be James's, inasmuch as in his day the *e* was beyond doubt getting irregular. But it would be chiefly valuable in supporting certain contentions, as to Chaucer himself and others, which it is not necessary to repeat.

#### B *Guest's Symbol for marking Accent, and its Bearings*

When I wrote, when I revised for press, and when I published, the remarks on Guest's fashion of marking accent and its consequences at Vol I pp 8-10, I was not unprepared for remonstrances, on the ground of misunderstanding and unfairness, in connection with Professor Skeat's warning comment. They were duly made, both by reviewers of the book and in private communications. Of these—in the absence of Appendices to Vol II, and in view of the fact that Guest's own book could not be treated in full till this third volume—there seemed to be neither way to treat nor means of treating earlier than here. And I shall frankly confess that, even here, I had at first intended to be Pharaonic or Pilatesque, and simply reaffirm my remarks. As, however, I find that some anti-Guestians are troubled in their minds on the matter, it may be better to give reasons why I cannot recede from the position I formerly took up in reference to the symbol |, its use, and its bearing on such matters as the passages originally cited from Cowper and Coleridge.

In the first place, I entirely deny anyone's right to use, or any one's right to defend the use of, a symbol which not only means division or nothing, but actually and in fact divides, by saying that it is "not meant" to divide. A man may as well cut my head off, and say that he only meant to make a harmless mark on the nape of my neck. That the same mark is used by

all the world, except Drs. Guest and Skeat, as a symbol of division in a particular form does not really matter, though it makes the rashness and the danger of the *misuse* greater. The fact would remain—even if, *per impossibile*, the sign had never suggested foot-division—that it is a sign of division of some kind. You may “call your hat Cadwallader” if you like, because Cadwallader is meaningless *per se* in the case, and, if only you explain your eccentric nomenclature, it is all right. But you may not call your hat a boot, and then object to some one’s bringing you a real boot when you do so.

And there is more. That the practice naturally misleads, though it is a pretty strong argument, might not be conclusive against it, for, it may be said, we ought to resist the temptation. Admitted. But if there had been no such thing as “schoolboy division” (I wish schoolboys never learnt anything worse!), if foot-scansion did not exist, this practice of Guest’s would suggest something akin to it. It is, I fear, useless to argue, as it has been argued by an obliging correspondent of mine, that Guest’s actual “sections” save him. These sections are often, if not always, quite independent of “feet” of any kind. The point is that, if you draw attention *by any means*, but most of all by a division-mark, to separate batches of syllables, you inevitably tempt the voice to halt between those batches. Or—to give almost preposterously lavish rope—when you make no division but at “sections,” you suggest that it does not matter where the minor divisions are. Now it *does* matter: it matters infinitely, in both examples given, where these minor divisions are. It is a question in one case of a dignified and almost mournful trochaic or of a jerky and ill-fitted iambic, in the other, of the whole great problem whether the English hexameter is a dactylic measure at all, or anapæstic with anacrusis and catalexis. It is on division that these questions turn, it is a particular division in each case that the marking suggests, it is, if you consent to waive suggestion altogether and simply believe the evidence of your senses, the reality of this division that it enforces.

For these reasons, as well as for others, I must decline to withdraw my original remarks.<sup>1</sup>

### C *The Metre of Spenser’s “February”*

The occurrence of *Christabel* in this volume would in any case form no bad text for some discussion on the older examples of its metre. But it so happens that, since I wrote on those examples, there has been fresh handling of the subject from a point of view

<sup>1</sup> In connection with this *v. sup.* p. 276

opposite to mine Mr W W Greg, in his most excellent book on *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama* (London, 1906) has some remarks *obiter* on Spenser's rhythm in "February," "May," and "September" of the *Shepherd's Kalendar*, and incidentally on the general breakdown of versification from 1400-1550. He goes so far as to think that "there can surely be no doubt as to the actual origin" of the measure denoted above.

I am so far in an inferior condition to Mr Greg that I am less undoubting than he as to my own solution (*op. sup.* 1 353 and elsewhere) of this origin. But I may say that I have no doubt whatever as to the insufficiency—if not as to the total incorrectness—of his. He thinks that "in Spenser's day all memory of the syllabic *e* had long since vanished, and the only rhythm to be extracted from Chaucer's verse was of a four-stress type." And, reversing the process of argument, he thinks that you can recreate a Chaucerian "five-beat" out of Spenserian fours, as thus

Tho openèd he the dore, and innè came  
The fulsè fox as he were starkè lame

It is fair to say that he makes some qualification in a note, but the note itself contains the statement above quoted as to "no doubt," and Mr Greg fortifies himself by reference to Mr Courthope (*Hist. Eng. Poetry*, II 253). Moreover, all students of the *Kalendar* are aware that Professor Herford holds not dissimilar views. But (and I say this as a hearty admirer of Mr Greg's book and of the other two scholars mentioned) I do not think this will do. In the first place, the solution is surely *inadequate*—quite incommensurable with the facts. Large numbers of Chaucer's most memorable and characteristic lines cannot be squeezed into "four-beats" anyhow—or only at the cost of sacrificing all harmony. The best—there are not many to sample—of Spenser's "four-beats," such as the great passage towards the close of "February," cannot by any *e*-mongering be got into fives. Besides, the explanation ignores, not merely the presence of equivalenced octosyllables from *Genesis* and *Exodus* downwards, but the not infrequent occurrence among these of actual decasyllables, which we have been so careful to trace.<sup>1</sup> These pre-Chaucerians, whatever they were doing, were certainly not mismetring Chaucer!

In fact Mr Greg seems to me to give up his own point when he says that the lines only become decasyllables "*by accident*." Not only is this not the case, but they are constantly decasyllables in Elizabethan English—which again upsets the whole theory. Spenser might conceivably have thought that Chaucer meant four

<sup>1</sup> Any one who cares to search the Romances will find them in abundance.

when he really meant five But could such a poet—such a metrist—have written five when he himself meant four?

Mr Greg, of course, is not dealing with prosody directly—this passage is a mere digression—hardly more, as has been said, than a mere *obiter dictum* But it illustrates, I think, the mischief of the “beat” system, and the way in which it tempts even men of sound literary judgment to acquiesce in a kind of muddle, and to think that poets of the finest ear and poetic sense could be deaf and blind, not merely to other poets’ music, but to their own For, after all, if Spenser thought Chaucer’s metre “four-beat” even occasionally, how, in the name of the Five Fingers and the Ten Commandments, did he himself ever come to write *Mother Hubbard’s Tale* in obvious following of Chaucer?

The question seems to me to be not improperly stated thus Here is a poet who has left a body of some forty or fifty thousand verses, including perhaps ten thousand in the most various metres Every one of these (except a very few which are obvious oversights or half-done work) exhibits a system of rhythmical-metrical arrangement to which the ear of this present reader and writer submits itself without the slightest difficulty, hesitation, or doubt. The three *Kalendar* pieces likewise adjust themselves to this system most interestingly, and perhaps a very little surprisingly, but in a manner which necessitates not the slightest forcing of ear or conscience—and which ceases even to be surprising when the true historical Pisgah is resorted to, and *The Oak and the Brere* is seen between *Genesis and Exodus* long before and *Christabel* long after

On the other hand, admit that Spenser can have meant these passages for (however loose) Chaucerian heroics, and the marriage of true ears is hopelessly divorced The calculus which has accounted for the whole vast and complicated problem breaks utterly down Nor this alone, for the passages become inconsistent with themselves They contain plenty of *actual* heroics or decasyllables, perfectly well constructed and rhymed If he had meant these throughout, there is no conceivable reason why he should not have given them throughout A muddle of hit and miss is rather more unlikely from Spenser than from any poet in the world Even his early classical versings, whatever liberties they may take with pronunciation and accentuation, achieve what they try to do with perfect regularity Here we are to suppose that his instrument is to start aside like a broken bow at one moment and to shoot strong and true the next—that he himself is to be Chaucer at one moment and John Metham at another The thing is not reasonable

It becomes least reasonable of all when we judge simply by

the result, *The Oak and the Brere* (with the other pieces in a somewhat minor degree) is, when regarded and read as a concerted piece, in mingled octosyllabics with substitution, and decasyllabics without, a charming thing, what becomes of the charm, if you regard it as a piece in mingled correct and go-as-you-please decasyllables, is more than I can say—or rather I think I can say that it becomes utter ugliness. Of course this may be a question of taste. But when it is remembered that this argument from taste reinforces another argument of almost mathematical stringency from the wide, detailed practice of the poet, and a third from the general character and colour of that practice; the threefold cord becomes, to my fancy, a pretty stout twist. To me yet a fourth strand—the evidence of *Mother Hubbard's Tale*—makes it a very hawser. And I cannot help thinking that the attempt to break this by saying "He may have changed his mind" is rather a confession. "Why *should* he change his mind?" especially when nothing of any sort is gained by supposing that he did. Why did he change his mind, and his ear, and the beat of his fingers, and his whole style as a poet, on this occasion only, especially when there are in the *Kalendar*-pieces just as good decasyllabic couplets as in *Mother Hubbard* herself? Surely the fact is that he did *not* change his mind at all—that he at one time intended to write pure riding rhyme, and at another and earlier did not, but accepted the equivalenced octosyllable, familiar to him in ballad and romance, for continuous use.<sup>1</sup>

#### D Some Modern Instances

In the text I have from time to time introduced a few, but very few, instances of apparent difficulties which I think might be removed, *aporiae* or *cruces* which might be solved, and mistakes which might have been avoided or corrected, if the system of this book had been applied. Here are a few more, beginning with two from recent reviews of poetry.

"His versification is at times frightfully confusing. He mixes up iambs, anapæsts, etc., so that one can hardly hope to find two lines the same."

A very frequent case indeed with Shakespeare, Milton, and other poor creatures. I may at least hope that the reader of

<sup>1</sup> He had precedents enough even in this, and among them has been aptly suggested the piece entitled "How the Ploughman learned his Paternoster" (Wright and Halliwell's *Reliquiæ Antiquæ*, i. 43-47), printed by W. de Worde. This overflows, not merely into decasyllables, but into "long doggerel" once more (*v. sup.* i. 353, and *note* there) like Heywood. (Also *v. sup.* p. 532 *note*.)

this book will "hardly hope" what the reviewer hoped, but for quite different reasons, and that he certainly will not be confused by finding iambs mixed up with anapæsts

Again

"He is alternately scrupulous and careless as to form and art, though it is hard to ascribe to carelessness such lines as—

He knew he could not die in the spring-tide,

and this, which is still worse—

• We look toward the goal that never nears "

I hope again that most readers of this book will be prepared to accept both these lines as perfectly—the second, perhaps, as rather unusually—good, and I should not mind if they felt some bewilderment as to where the supposed "carelessness" comes in. The lengthening of "the," especially before "spring," which can be the only thing objected to in the first line, is, of course, justified by thousands of good examples, and is not even absolutely necessary. As to the second, if the reviewer thought the scansion "tō-wārd" wrong, he simply was wrong himself, though I am aware that some prosodists (generally of the accentual order) would defend him.

Here is a still more surprising case.<sup>1</sup> In the *North American Review* for November 1907, "C. E. Russell" wrote thus in reference to a line in "Evening on the Broads"

"What can be made by the formerly accepted systems of prosody of such *hexameters* [*sic*] as—

Full-sailed, | wide-winged, | poised softly, | forever | asway?

[divisions original] The *usual* [*sic*] explanation is that Mr. Swinburne carelessly, indolently, or for some occult purpose, interposed *one* line of five feet, and also to make the fifth foot a spondee and the remaining feet anapæsts "

Now I have met unsound explanations enough, and more than enough, but I do not believe that even Steele or Thelwall ever got into such a state of explanatory mania as this. In the first place, the line, which is identical in form with dozens of others, including the opening pair in the even places<sup>1</sup> of the poem, is only a *hexameter* in the sense in which every even line in Ovid's elegiac poems is a hexameter. In the second, I hardly suppose that even the quantitative hexametrists would make "asway" a spondee. In the third, what kind of incredible monster can the anapæst be in Mr Russell's eyes that "poised

<sup>1</sup> *V. sup.* p. 350 note, and p. 424

softly" or "forever" represents it? and what sort of rhythm can he imagine that his arrangement gets on the whole line? The "formerly accepted system of prosody," the "usual explanation," as I take them, simply say that the line is a perfect *pentameter* of its kind—

Full-sailed, | wide-winged, | poised || softly, for|ever a|sway,

but that, like all good English hexameters and pentameters, it slips out, or is ready to slip out, into anapæsts, equivalenced or altered thus—

Full |sailed, wide-|winged, poised || soft|ly, for ev|er asway, |

the penthemimers being turned upside down and the half foot preceding instead of ending each

In yet another case I agree with Mr Omond exactly, when he says that the scansion, quoted above, of

By the wa|ters of Ba|bylon we sat down | and wept, |

suggested by Gurney and approved by Professor Lewis, "reduces it to prose," though it can be made much more rhythmical prose otherwise. But let it be observed that the line, which is not unmetrical, though not of the very best, is susceptible of other scansions which are not prose. You may make it an anapæstic dimeter, with the rickety "Moorish" foisting of a slurred syllable (*v sup* p 85)—

By the wa|ters of Baby|lon we sat | down and wept, |

though I should not. You can do it trochaic-dactylic fashion—

By the | waters of | Babylon | we sat | down and | wept, |

which I should not like, but which is metrical, possible, and, as a unit, defensible. Best of all, one may make it into an unusual but legitimate and rather beautiful middle-pause line, thus—

By the wa|ters of Ba|bylon we || sat down | and wept,

which would have to be continued somewhat in this way—

And our harps { on a sor|rowful tree || hung while | we slept—

a measure not unlike some of Mr Swinburne's

Lastly, I came across, quite recently, a singular scansion which illustrates, particularly well, the peril of irregular section-scanning in relation to Mr Swinburne himself. In a generally excellent book just issued, on *English Grammar and Composition*, by Mr A. M. Williams (London, 1909) it is said (whether at

first hand or as a quotation I am not sure) <sup>A</sup> In 'Mater Triumphalis' the choriamb and the pæon occur, *e.g.*—

Thou art the play|er, whose órgan-|keys are thunders "

Now, in the first place, the metre of "Mater Triumphalis" (*Songs before Sunrise*, p 171) is, throughout, perfectly plain heroic quatrain, with double rhymes in first and third lines, and equivalenced freely after the poet's fashion. The line in question is simply—

• Thou art | the play|er whose or|gan keys | are thun|ders—

four iambs, one anapæst, and a redundant syllable for double rhyme. But while the proposed scansion is quite unnecessary, it is in itself impossible *for verse*. A sort of prose rhythm can be got out of it, but no verse, while if, *per impossibile*, there could, it would be utterly unlike the scores of corresponding verses in the same places elsewhere. Not that this would disturb some of our new prosodists—certainly not my friend Dr M'Cormick, who, not long ago, in a paper read before the Glasgow Philosophical Society, proposed to do away with the general "heroic," "decasyllabic," "five-foot," "five-stress," etc., classification altogether, in favour of "lines with three bars of two beats," "lines with two bars of two beats," etc. But those of us who see the unbroken unity, in whatever diversity, of the great English staple line from Chaucer to Swinburne, will hardly admit this beat and bar to make, and still less permit it to mar, the not yet foolish Fates of English poetry.

#### E Notes (not strictly *Corrigenda*) for Vol II

(a) P 16 —A very well-willing and most competent reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian* has mildly rebuked me for "not reckoning with the well-known fact that *Love's Labour's Lost* was largely rewritten about the period of *The Merchant of Venice*." Now, certainly the play was printed in 1597 as "corrected and augmented," but whether this can justly be translated into "largely rewritten," especially in any prosodic sense, I take leave to doubt. There may be some later insertions perhaps, but at any rate the author "left the verdure"—he did not remove the bloom of prosodic youth from it as a whole.

(β) P 149 note —I have been stigmatised as "incorrigibly careless" (for the world never goes so hard with some Cliffords that they cannot spare their friends strong language) for following Mr Arber, Mr Lee and other modern editors in quoting the last



line of Sidney's Alexandrine sonnet as decasyllabic. I certainly might have remembered that I had seen it with the "to me" in older editions, and, never having made a special study of original texts and MSS, in Sidney's case, I cannot say whether the shortening has any justification or not. If it has not, the remark based on it of course falls to the ground. But it is in any case a great improvement.

(γ) *Woodford*—By one of those overlookings of notes which only the most superhuman orderliness will prevent, when part of one's work has to be carried on in public libraries during absences from home, I omitted an item, where it was specially wanted, in book vii chap. iv. This was the prosodic contribution of Samuel Woodford in the prefaces to his *Paraphrases On the Psalms of David* (1667) and *On the Canticles* (1679). There is not much bulk of matter in them, but they, especially the latter, are interesting for two things. First, trisyllabic feet are definitely recognised and defended—a thing almost unique before Shenstone—as well as redundant syllables and dissyllabic rhymes. Secondly, he actually takes account of Milton from the prosodic point of view, though he is less happy here, regarding blank verse as prose, and not merely printing a piece of it as such, but printing a piece of Milton's prose as verse. The double attitude is curious, and might have been fruitful, but the time was not yet.

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